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Workplace Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Female Police Officers in the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary

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ABSTRACT

Research into Canadian workplace experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) public safety personnel is scant. This exploratory ethnographic study examined reasons for lesbian and bisexual female officers joining the police, their shared workplace experiences, perceived career barriers based on sexual orientation, and perceptions of police leadership in advancing the inclusion of LGBTQ officers in the profession. Informed by intersectionality theory and thematic analysis, in-depth semistructured interviews were conducted with three active police officers in a medium-sized Canadian city. Four major themes emerged: (a) change in career paths in response to evolving life situations and desire for rewarding, nonmonotonous work; (b) latent stereotypes and biases within otherwise supportive organizational cultures; (c) sexual orientation not a barrier to career opportunities and advancement; and (d) strong support for LGBTQ diversity and inclusion at work but remaining challenges in police–LGBTQ community relations. Implications and recommendations for practice are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Police organizations generally promote a mandate of diversity. They seek to reflect the kaleidoscope of the communities they serve, in terms of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, or sexual orientation (Bhugowandeen, 2013; Burke, 1993; Couto, 2014, 2018; Jones & Williams, 2015; Kirkup, 2013; Sklansky, 2006). Nevertheless, policing is still considered a male-dominated profession (Bevan & MacKenzie, 2012; Murray, 2021; Sklansky, 2006), underrepresenting equity-deserving groups such as women (Bikos, 2016; Franklin, 2005; Montgomery, 2012), members of visible minorities (Jain et al., 2000; Marcoux et al., 2016; Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021),[1] Indigenous people (Marcoux et al., 2016; Parent & Parent, 2019), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people (Colvin, 2012; Couto, 2014, 2018; van Ewijk, 2012). Attention has been paid to increasing the representation of women and visible minority groups in police ranks (Colvin, 2015; Gibbs, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2019). This effort has, recently, created a groundswell of need for police organizations to pursue parallel equity initiatives with LGBTQ people (Colvin, 2015; Kirkup, 2013; Pratka, 2008). Some improvement in LGBTQ representation in policing is evident due to these equity initiatives. For example, Sklansky (2006) observed that

between 1992 and 2001 the number of LGBTQ officers in the San Diego Police Department increased from five to anywhere between 35 and 50. Likewise, in 2004, an estimated 20,000 LGBTQ people were reportedly employed as police officers in the UK (Blackbourn, 2006). In both contexts, the number is likely much higher today, given legal advancement in LGBTQ rights and changing attitudes toward LGBTQ people. Available Canadian data suggest that women now account for 22 percent of all police officers and that visible minorities and Indigenous people make up 8 percent and 4 percent of police officers respectively (Statistics Canada, 2019). Canadian data are not available for the number of currently active LGBTQ police members.

A growing body of international research has examined how LGBTQ officers perceive their workplace environment (Burke, 1993; Colvin, 2015; Jones & Williams, 2015; Mennicke et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2003). But, despite some improvement, LGBTQ officers still face subtle forms of discrimination such as attitudinal bias, differential treatment and stereotypes, bias allocation, workplace harassment, and challenges and barriers to promotion (Belkin & McNichol, 2002; Colvin, 2015; Mennicke et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2003). They may choose to not disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity at work, fearing isolation, harassment, bullying, and loss of participation in teams (Jones, 2015).

Most previous research on the workplace conditions of LGBTQ police officers has been conducted in the U.S. and the UK (Burke, 1993; Charles & Arndt, 2013; Colvin, 2015). Much less research has been done on the employment outcomes and experiences of Canadian LGBTQ people (Ng & Rumens, 2017; Waite et al., 2019) in general, and police officers in particular. In fact, only two such studies of LGBTQ police officers were found (Couto, 2014, 2018), both of which were gray literature—the first completed for an academic degree and the second produced for an academic institution.[2] Since workplace discrimination against LGBTQ people is a global phenomenon (Mendos, 2019), research from various social and cultural contexts is needed to improve the workplace experiences of LGBTQ police officers. Therefore, in our exploratory ethnographic study, we sought to gain insights into the workplace experiences of lesbian and bisexual female officers employed by the oldest police organization in North America (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, n.d.).

LITERATURE REVIEW

LGBTQ Officers and Police Culture

Although there is no single police culture, police have historically regulated the construction of deviance in a society. Given the historical view of the LGBTQ identity as deviant (Burke, 1994), it too was thus policed. Couto (2014) attributed the discrimination of LGBTQ officers to police oppression of the LGBTQ community, such as the 1969 police raid on the Stonewall Inn. Applying Schein's model of organizational culture, Couto (2014) found that the police culture in Ontario, Canada, maintained and reinforced a hypermasculine and heterosexual character. Others, like Charles and Arndt (2013), noted the concept of "blue identity" to explain how inherently hypermasculine codes for behavior are reinforced through officer recruitment and training. These codes carry on throughout an officer's career.

LGBTQ-identifying police officers navigate their identities as a subculture within the larger police culture (Sklansky, 2006), which varies across services, time, and space (Chan, 1996). The level of organizational support from those in higher positions directly shapes the experiences of LGBTQ officers and impacts job satisfaction (Couto, 2014; Lloren & Parini, 2017). Although employee groups such as the Gay Officers Action League were created to address organizational concerns, ongoing exclusionary practices remain intact, causing issues for LGBTQ officers' engagement and satisfaction (Collins & Rocco, 2018; Githens & Aragon, 2007; Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018). Moreover, because the culture of policing privileges professionalism and duty

over diversity (Couto, 2014), organizational support for LGBTQ officers might be perceived by some of these officers as forced (Jones & Williams, 2015).

Intersecting and Dual Identities

Charles and Arndt (2013) studied the dual identities—sexual and vocational—of lesbian and gay officers. Such officers have a unique experience compared to other socially marginalized groups, since they can choose to disclose or conceal their sexual identities (Hassell & Brandl, 2009). While their sexual identity can be marginalizing, their "blue identity" as a police officer is privileged—it is seen as the presenting identity. The decision to reveal one's sexual or gender identity at work takes into consideration physical safety and social isolation, alongside institutional considerations such as the potential impact on evaluations, opportunities for promotions, and assignments (Colvin, 2009, 2015). Miller et al. (2003) found that the decision to reveal one's sexual identity fell along a continuum; some officers were selective in who they told, whether they told anyone, or if they decided to keep their sexuality private. Disclosure often appeared at odds with police culture, which not only complicated decisions around managing a dual identity but also potentially affected LGBTQ officers' mental health, work performance, and personal relationships (Burke, 1994). A leading factor for LGBTQ officers' deciding whether to disclose was the perception and amount of discrimination experienced in the workplace; officers who were not open about their sexual orientation and gender identity faced reduced likelihood of discrimination (Jones & Williams, 2015).

The way that gender intersects with sexual orientation in police culture creates additional challenges that LGBTQ officers have to navigate. LGBTQ officers have differing experiences based on the different levels of intersecting identities. For example, Hassell and Brandl (2009) examined the impact of diversity on workplace stress, finding that individuals with the least amount of representation (e.g., lesbian, gay, and bisexual officers) had the least favorable experiences. Racialized LGBTQ officers, Miller et al. (2003) findings showed, were least likely to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity, indicating that their intersecting identities impacted them negatively at work. They also found that gender stereotypes shape the experiences of lesbian and gay officers. Specifically, lesbian-identifying officers are viewed as more masculine than heterosexual female police officers, while gay male officers are viewed as more feminine than heterosexual male officers. Lesbian officers may experience greater acceptance within policing than their gay male counterparts, as they are seen to conform to masculine gender stereotypes (Charles & Arndt, 2013). In turn, lesbian officers are less likely to report workplace experiences of discrimination (Tucker et al., 2019). Couto (2018), however, challenged the perception that masculine stereotypes benefited lesbian-identifying officers, arguing their assumed masculinity and acceptance into the "boys' club" could be a threat to heterosexual female officers, resulting in discrimination and harassment.

Discrimination and Barriers

Charles and Arndt (2013) studied how sexual identity impacted work satisfaction for lesbian and gay officers. They found that police culture could be a hostile work environment for sexual minorities, lowering their job satisfaction. Discrimination was more common in contexts where greater supervisory discretion was perceptible, such as in the area of operational policing (Jones, 2015). Not all lesbian and gay officers in Charles and Arndt's study were open at work about their sexuality; they reported witnessing higher rates of homophobic attitudes in the workplace, influencing their decision to maintain their hidden sexuality at work.

Despite growing numbers of LGBTQ individuals joining police forces, attitudinal barriers, discrimination, and harassment still exist (Tucker et al., 2019), reflecting the experiences of the

larger LGBTQ community (Mallory et al., 2015). Miller et al. (2003) lesbian, gay, and bisexual survey participants all reported experiencing antigay jokes, hearing derogatory slang, and seeing antigay graffiti or cartoons around the police station. Employment barriers—to promotion, assignments, or evaluation—were commonly experienced (Colvin, 2009). Derogatory insults, professional humiliation, physical violence, and refusal of heterosexual officers to work in close proximity with LGBTQ coworkers were also commonplace (Couto, 2014). The workplace experiences of transgender officers remains relatively unexplored, but some transgender officers have experienced harassment and discrimination (Tucker et al., 2019). Witnessed discrimination was higher than reported experienced discrimination; however, this could be attributed to the multiplier effect (Colvin, 2015). Galvin-White and O'Neal (2016) distinguished the unique barriers to advancement in employment for LGBTQ-identifying individuals as *the lavender ceiling*, which describes the struggle faced by LGBTQ officers to advance at the same rate as heterosexual coworkers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research study applies intersectionality as a framework for understanding the workplace experiences of lesbian and bisexual female officers. Intersectionality highlights the overlapping power relations of social identities—the ways that different aspects of identity interact and work simultaneously to shape multiple dimensions of people's experiences, especially those involving oppression and discrimination (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989). Sexual orientation or gender identities, for example, are facets of a person's identity that influence how they experience the world (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989; Giwa et al., 2021). In intersectionality, these identities—among others—are thought of as interlocking with the social categories of race, age, or class to create new patterns of experiences and perspectives (Razack, 2008). The characteristically White, male, hypermasculine police culture, laced with heteronormative ideals, reinforces dominant norms of sexual and gender identity (Sun & Payne, 2004). Researchers have underscored the differing experiences of lesbian versus gay officers (Bikos, 2016; Couto, 2018; Murray, 2021), noting how traditional gender stereotypes normalize the masculine characteristics of the ideal worker (Silvestri, 2017). Thus, intersectionality is ideal for understanding the ways that lesbian and bisexual female officers' multiple identities play out in the workplace, to either reproduce positions of privilege or disadvantage them.

METHODS

Study Setting and Design

In July 2014 the leading police organization for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador—the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC)—launched a video campaign aiming to remove barriers for LGBTQ people serving as police officers. The video's message of respect, tolerance, and diversity was consistent with the broader communication strategy of most police organizations in Canada, in its endorsement of a more diverse, respectful, and accepting workplace. Yet the actual quality of the climate at Canadian police organizations for nonheterosexual and gender-nonconforming officers remains understudied. In response, we employed a qualitative descriptive (Sandelowski, 2000) method of inquiry to explore how lesbian and bisexual female RNC officers experienced their work environment and the meanings they attributed to those experiences.

Recruitment and Procedures

To begin, the first author met with the RNC chief of police and one of his superintendents to discuss the goals of the research study. The chief then emailed a letter of support to the first author, signaling that the study could proceed, and delegating the aforementioned superintendent to provide ongoing support during the study period. Ethics approval for the research was obtained from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR Number 20181165-SW) at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

To recruit participants, a flyer was sent through the RNC's internal communication system, with the help of the superintendent. It specified that the study was not being conducted by the RNC and was not a job requirement. To protect the privacy of officers who did not wish to have their sexual orientation or gender identity known within the organization, interested participants were asked to contact the first author directly. Despite these measures, recruitment proved challenging. Over a period of three months (from February to April 2018), with recruitment extended month-by-month, only four officers indicated an interest in the study; in the end, three agreed to be interviewed.

Participants

In total, three female active-duty police officers were interviewed for the study. They self-reported as White, with a mean age of 33.6, and a combined police work experience of 22 years. They identified as either lesbian or bisexual. At the time of the study, they held at least a bachelor's degree. None of them had formally come out at work. However, they all said that their sexual orientation was known by others, suggesting that they had not kept their sexual orientation hidden. Given the small sample and the need for confidentiality and anonymity, information we can provide about the participants is limited.

Data Collection

The participants completed a consent form attesting to their understanding of the research study and their voluntary participation in it. The first author collected interview data in semistructured interviews, asking questions related to (a) reasons for choosing to become a police officer; (b) workplace treatment and experience as an LGBTQ officer; (c) impact of LGBTQ identity, if any, on career development opportunities and success; and (d) police leadership effectiveness in promoting workplace inclusion of LGBTQ officers. Interview questions were minimally to moderately structured and open-ended, to generate a detailed account of participants' experiences and to allow the research interviewer and participants to pursue additional topics of interest. The interviews took place at an agreed-upon location, and were audiorecorded and transcribed. Interviews lasted between one and two hours. Participants were offered CAD$15 compensation for their time and contribution to the study.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, we followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive thematic process. This data-driven approach to coding does not try to fit data into preexisting themes, coding frames, or researchers' analytic preconceptions, and is not bound to a theoretical framework. The first author and a graduate research assistant read the transcribed data for an overall understanding of the workplace treatment and experiences of research participants. Data saturation was reached when no new codes could be identified (Fusch & Ness, 2015). After coding all transcripts, the codes and their associated data were examined and organized in chronological order, with

similarly related codes grouped into categories or themes. Selected quotations are used below, to support our research claims and to illuminate the experiences of research participants. Where necessary, quotations have been edited for grammar and readability. Pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants.

FINDINGS

Change in Career Paths in Response to Evolving Life Situations and Desire for Rewarding but Not Monotonous Work

Participants reported commonalities in the factors they described as motivating a career in policing. They described policing as paying well, and providing opportunities to engage in a range of duties and roles. Motivating factors included policing as a dependable and interesting career—particularly when other employment opportunities in the field of interest were grim. For example, one participant indicated that, despite her career interest in policy writing, she required a job that would help pay for her partner's education while supporting them both:

> My plan was to go into the not-for-profit sector, specifically policy writing or something of that nature. My wife was also going through university at the time and we were taking turns—she would go full-time and I would work full-time to pay for her university and then we would switch out. When she graduated it became very evident that I needed to perhaps find employment that was going to pay me. (Kendra)

In deciding to become a police officer, Kendra stated, she weighed her professional aspiration or interest against the practicalities of her home life and relationship, and found the latter more significant. For her, employment in the not-for-profit sector was not sustainable in the long term. She could maximize her earning potential as a police officer, to help meet her and her wife's evolving life situations; this might be harder to do in a lower-paying industry.

Participants noted a problematic lack of jobs matching their professional interests. This made policing—a good job with benefits—attractive. One participant said:

> I was working in the business field and I moved home due to something that happened in my personal life. One of my parents got sick so I moved back to Newfoundland and Labrador. I was living away and the job market here was not great for my field and I eventually applied to become a police officer. It's a good job. It's a government job, [with] good benefits. (Sandra)

Sandra had left Newfoundland and Labrador to pursue her interest in business elsewhere. She would have continued living and working outside of the province in the absence of exigent circumstances. However, on returning to care for her ill parent, she encountered the same problem that had driven her to leave in the first place—poor labor market conditions in her field of work. Believing that her business skills were transferable, she made the decision to become a police officer which, coupled with the prospect of job and financial security, enabled her to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Participants were also motivated to work as police by their interpretation of the police role as nuanced and engaging rather than repetitive, thus providing them with a wealth of diverse learning experiences. As police, they would have the opportunity to interact regularly with the community and help citizens. Participating officers considered the RNC was an organization that served the community well; they wanted to be a part of it:

> I guess, in the simplest form, I joined so [that] I could help people. I wanted a career that I'd be active in doing something different every day. Something I guess where I'd be out in the community. I really like that I see different people every day—I mean, I see some of the same people every day as well, but I like that I'm out there dealing with people and every day is different. (Leslie)

According to Leslie, a career in policing offered the possibility of a dynamic, unpredictable work life, where repetitive and monotonous tasks were not the norm. She was drawn to the idea

of working closely with community members and being challenged to find solutions to different and complex issues every day. The potential for direct impact, or making a change in people's lives, stood out for her as an advantage of being a police officer.

Sandra's narrative demonstrates that a person's primary reason for joining the police force might not always be altruistic. Although doing "good" and making the community "better" are ideas that resonated with Sandra, they were not the primary motivators. Sandra decided to become a police officer because it suited her lifestyle and views: "Yeah, it just suited my life at the time, so I applied and I got in. Of course, you want to do good and better the community and that stuff as well, but [those were] not my motivating factors" (Sandra). At the time, she prioritized a job matched to her current lifestyle; a perceived lack of fit might have caused her to look past the opportunity.

Supportive Organizational Culture and Confronting Latent Stereotypes and Biases

Participants described the workplace culture at the RNC as accepting and supportive. They did not feel targeted or excluded because of their sexual orientation. On the contrary, they portrayed a close-knit, family-like environment where coworkers supported them during major events in their personal and professional lives. For example, one participant who had been out at work noted:

> I can honestly say [that] my own workplace experiences have been overwhelmingly positive as an out member of the LGBTQ community. It really has been. I got engaged and married while I was working. My entire platoon came to my wedding. [B]eing a minority—as a woman—is far more damaging than being a minority as an LGBTQ at work. At work, I often have to remind the men that I work with … that I'm a lesbian and that … locker room talk and whatnot is fine, but I need [them] to reel it in because I am still a woman and I don't want to hear these things. (Kendra)

Echoing the description of other participants, Kendra shared that her workplace experience had been extremely positive. The camaraderie and sense of belonging and genuine connection she had with her coworkers were exemplified by their attendance at her wedding. This is not to say the she did not encounter challenges at work. However, her challenges were unrelated to her sexual orientation. Rather, being a woman and navigating thinly veiled treatment of women as incapable of performing police work was especially difficult:

> I just spoke to this on International Women's Day. We had a panel and I think they wanted us to say everything is great and everything is fine, but it's not. I still deal with leadership who will say, well, you can't do that by yourself; I'll send a guy with you. The same man at work would never get that treatment; he'd be able to go and do it himself. Simple small things, [such as] doing an alarm—that's a call we do 10 times a day. (Kendra)

Although Kendra did not think leadership had bad intentions in assigning a male officer to accompany her on the alarm call, for her this amounted to an underestimation of her and other women's ability to perform the duties of a police officer. This double standard was seen as unjustified; a male officer would not have been treated in the same way. During the panel on International Women's Day, leadership wanted to project the image of an organization embracing diversity and the inclusion of female officers. But their sexist practice contradicted this image, Kendra believed.

Participants described an unspoken expectation from their straight male colleagues that they would participate in the discussion of women's attractiveness in ways that objectified them. Participants believed their coworkers based this expectation on the women's emotional and sexual attraction to women. They observed that some of these male colleagues might have thought that indecorous speech about women would be okay—that it would be reciprocated, validated, and not found abhorrent. One participant had this to say:

> Like, sometimes, the guys kind of think that you have the same mindset as them. So you kind of have to put it out there that we're not the same … the way [they] see women is not how I see women and I don't really want to talk about [women] like that with them. (Leslie)

Leslie's and other participants' being sexually attracted to women became perceived, by their male colleagues, as a possible point of connection. Their male colleagues could see them as "one of the boys," unlike cisgender heterosexual women, and therefore say things to them that they might not say to heterosexual female colleagues. Having to continuously assert their gender as women, and women whose views about other women differed from their male colleagues, placed additional burdens on them.

Participants viewed their own agency and attributes as positively contributing to their experiences at work. The underlying narrative was that people "treat you the way you let them treat you." Having confidence and projecting it, participants suggested, helped them to maintain a lighthearted approach to situations that could be otherwise challenging or taboo. One participant noted:

> I'm a very confident person; I always have been. I just have never had any challenges, really … . There's a lot of black humor … . We're a bit more off color, I guess, in some of the comments that we make to each other. I'm pretty easy going: I don't take offense to very much either. (Sandra)

Sandra's self-confidence reportedly staved off any negative treatment from others and contributed to an overall positive workplace experience. Despite not encountering challenges, she thought that dark humor was pervasive in the workplace, but this was not taken seriously in a formal sense. Moreover, Sandra explained that "There's a lot of—I'm putting this in quotations—'harassment'"-type behaviors that were treated or downplayed as black humor, referring to the lighthearted way that officers talked among themselves about otherwise sensitive or taboo topics. Ultimately, though, she weathered the sometimes "off-color" culture at the RNC and maintained her easygoing demeanor by not taking things personally or as an offense.

All participants in our study believed that gay men had more challenging workplace experiences than lesbian and bisexual women. They expressed concerns that the police culture might not favor gay men coming out or self-identifying:

> I do feel like there is still work to do in terms of gay men in the policing culture. … The culture of how we talk about gay men … still [needs] a lot of work and the things that are said are still not right. So, I think the culture maybe isn't conducive to coming out if you were a gay man. (Leslie)

When asked to elaborate on this, Leslie continued:

> I think [that] as we diversify as a police force maybe that would minimize a bit, but right now, we still are predominantly White [and] cis male … . I think that … the culture especially on patrol is very much … hypermasculine … . Maybe that has something to do with it. (Leslie)

Although some progress had been made toward diversifying the workplace, the organization remained predominantly White and cis male. Leslie suggested that these factors combined with a hypermasculine police culture on patrol, where discussion about gay men might take a pejorative turn. For her, this culture reinforced the idea that being gay was incompatible with being a male police officer, an understanding that might discourage gay officers from coming out or being open about themselves. Thus, the interplay of intersectionality among gay officers was rendered invisible.

Sexual Orientation is Not a Barrier to Career Opportunities and Advancement

Participants unanimously said that their sexual orientation did not create barriers to accessing career advancement. Development opportunities and career advancement were based on seniority; there was no room there for decision-makers to discriminate against someone based on sexual orientation or gender identity. In the participants' eyes, the organization's seniority-based

structure ensured that everyone was treated the same. Opportunities accrued to an individual officer based on their badge number; the person with the lowest badge number would be considered first for career development or promotion:

> Well, I feel like it's the same opportunities that anybody else with a similar badge number [would have access to], because a lot of our opportunities are based on seniority. I don't feel like my sexuality has come into any part of the equation. I'm not going to get a sergeant [position] until another few years because there are so many senior people above me who are going to get sergeant before I do. (Sandra)

While the current system of awarding career opportunities appeared equal and transparent, one participant seemed to raise doubt about the process's overall fairness, in ensuring a wider representation and advancement of LGBTQ people to leadership positions:

> [M]aybe there is something underlying there if there's only one out official that I can think of in the higher ranking but, again, that also speaks back [to the old] days. I don't think as many gay people were drawn to the profession of policing. (Leslie)

Because LGBTQ people only recently began joining the profession, and therefore had fewer years of service, in Leslie's view fewer of them were consequently in leadership positions. For Leslie, the current promotional structure might thus be contributing to the near invisibility of LGBTQ officers in leadership positions simply because it would take longer for those officers' badge numbers to reach the top of the queue.

Strong Support for LGBTQ Diversity and Inclusion at Work but Challenges Remain in Police-LGBTQ Community Relations

Participants agreed that police leadership was committed to a workplace culture inclusive of LGBTQ officers and to strong relationships with the LGBTQ community. Different initiatives evidenced this—trainings and workshops on LGBTQ language and rights, an LGBTQ recruitment video, gender-neutral washrooms, diversity bumper stickers, and rainbow flags. One commonly cited initiative was the LGBTQ diversity committee, created by police leadership to support LGBTQ officers:

> We meet and discuss … you know, what needs to happen or bring any issues forward " … " That's something fairly new. So, we had someone in upper management who felt this [committee] was necessary … to form, and it was put out force wide. [W]e welcome everyone's voices in this committee; it is primarily, you know, LGBTQ+-identified. But, there are also supervisors who have made the conscious decision to say, I want to sit on this committee, … I want to have my finger on the pulse of what is happening and what needs to happen in this organization. (Kendra)

Kendra's words demonstrate that the existence of the LGBTQ diversity committee and its continued support by police leadership communicated the value that LGBTQ officers brought to the organization. Opening the committee for anyone to join empowered committee members, LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ alike, to work together to create a workplace culture that welcomed and included LGBTQ officers. However, one participant thought that external pressure for political correctness might have influenced police leadership actions regarding workplace diversity and inclusivity. When asked to clarify what she meant by "there's a lot of politics here and they [have] got to play the role," Sandra said:

> They [the RNC] want to appear to be proactive, which you know we're being by doing this. They try to keep everybody happy and, you know, the community is made [up] of LGBTQ [people] as well. We do want to recruit everybody because we want the best people to be police officers. We want LGBTQ people to want to apply. The same as any big organization, I'm sure. (Sandra)

For Sandra, the RNC was similar to any organization in which leadership aspired to work toward diversity and inclusivity. However, her use of "appear" seems to suggest a feigned commitment on the part of the leadership. For her, part of diversity and inclusion work involved

keeping everyone—the LGBTQ community and the police—"happy." For the police, this could be helpful for recruiting eligible and qualified LGBTQ applicants. However, new recruits still needed to be "the best people to be police officers." In making decisions about who to hire, then, the overriding consideration should be who could do the job best and not whether one identified as LGBTQ.

Strain remains in existing police-LGBTQ community relations. One concern raised by participants was whether uniformed police should march in the local Pride parade. Discussion about a ban on uniformed police had, in their view, created a tense relationship between police and the LGBTQ community:

> I think people are frustrated about that. When part of the community doesn't want you involved in anything, I think that it kind of stings, and that's for straight police officers. I understand where they're coming from, but as a gay police officer, it stung a little bit because that's part of my identity; I identify as a police officer and I identify as a gay woman. So, when one part of my identity is saying … we don't want that part of you, it just kind of feels like I'm back there, where I could have been a police officer but I couldn't show my gay part. [I]t's a tricky thing because I understand where they're coming from and the fact that police officers can have triggering effects. I understand both sides, it's just too bad a compromise can't be made. I guess they're trying to strike a compromise. It's a hot topic for sure. (Leslie)

For Leslie the proposed ban was an organizational slight and a personal insult. It shunned police involvement in "anything" related to the LGBTQ community, which could undermine support from straight police officers. The proposed ban made her feel she had to choose between her LGBTQ identity and her police identity, rather than both identities intersecting and coexisting. Although she recognized that police could act as a trigger for some people, Leslie appealed for a compromise so police could participate in Pride in their uniforms.

Police leadership seemed to be moving in the right direction, but participants thought that more could still be done. In their view, system-wide changes were commendable but more was needed to inform officers about the LGBTQ community, which would serve to reduce intentional or unintentional offensive or derogatory treatment of certain members of the LGBTQ community:

> For sure, there is still a culture on patrol … [where a] … derogatory term or something like that [is used]. I think that maybe holding those people accountable for what they're saying and doing would suggest to the patrol that that's not going to work anymore … . [I]f we fix the culture on patrol, maybe that would spill out into our calls for services as well. So, like when we're dealing with trans members of the community, they wouldn't be snickering. I'm saying … snickering but there are comments being made, so maybe when everyone is on the same page and everyone has the same level of understanding of all the communities, the way we respond to calls will improve as well. (Leslie)

Leslie observed that holding officers accountable might help to shape their conduct on patrol, and send a clear message about unacceptable behaviors. Such accountability was required to inform existing practices when patrol responded to calls for services from LGBTQ community members. Otherwise, the potential existed for transgender individuals, for example, to be talked about in a negative or disparaging manner.

Biased or unfriendly attitudes toward LGBTQ people would be a definite barrier to LGBTQ people choosing a career in policing. However, participants felt confident that recruitment officers at RNC were neither biased nor unfriendly toward recruits who self-identified as LGBTQ. They felt that police leadership selected recruitment officers carefully for this role. Nonetheless, participants urged continued care with the selection process, to ensure the best possible outcome:

> I … think … they need to deal with the people who are like the face [of the organization], that are doing the recruiting or something like that, right. If they were biased or unfriendly toward LGBTQ [people] that would turn them off, but top management picks the recruiters, so they're not going to pick somebody who's either negative or not inclusive. (Sandra)

Sandra believed police leaders had mitigated the concern about biased or unfriendly treatment of the LGBTQ community by recruitment officers, yet continued vigilance needed to be maintained when appointing them, since they represented the face of the police organization to the public. Police recruiters who held negative opinions about LGBTQ people might inadvertently communicate the wrong impression about the workplace culture as unwelcoming to LGBTQ people, she thought, potentially driving away eligible and qualified applicants.

Participants expressed interest in having the role of an LGBTQ liaison officer included in the formal structures and operations of the organization, as part of a better practice approach to working with the LGBTQ community:

> I would like to see us have a formal LGBTQ liaison officer. We have one right now; it's not on paper, it's just sort of something that they are. But, there are other police forces [where] that's your job, you're the liaison officer, you know. (Kendra)

The role of LGBTQ liaison officer at RNC was not formally recognized. Doing so, Kendra believed, would legitimize the work being done by this person and bring the RNC in step with police organizations in other Canadian jurisdictions.

DISCUSSION

This research study sought to understand why participants chose a career in policing. We looked at their workplace experiences as self-identified lesbian and bisexual female officers, including whether their sexual orientation was a career barrier. Likewise, we investigated their perception of police leadership in advancing the inclusion of LGBTQ officers in policing. To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind in eastern Canada, and among the first across Canada (for related studies, see Couto, 2014, 2018). Adopting an intersectionality framework was important in elucidating how the embodied identities of police officers who are LGBTQ are inseparable and mutually constitutive (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989; Giwa et al., 2021). Some people might choose to keep their sexual orientation or gender identity hidden; nevertheless, intersectionality suggests that the experiences of LGBTQ officers might be qualitatively different from their heterosexual counterparts. Our findings provide a preliminary snapshot of the workplace experiences of lesbian and bisexual female officers in Newfoundland and Labrador, which future research could build upon.

In general, participants were motivated to join the RNC out of necessity, driven primarily by economic self-interest. They had either struggled to find work in their field or found employment opportunities and earnings in the not-for-profit sector inadequate to meet their personal, familial, and household needs. Although policing was not always participants' first career choice, it offered the potential for a higher salary and benefits. This finding corroborates that of previous studies, in which motivation among the general population for job security and benefits consistently ranked at the top of the list for why individuals joined the police (Lester, 1983; Moon & Hwang, 2004; Wu et al., 2009). Elntib and Milincic's (2021) study investigated motivations for becoming a police officer in 28 developing and developed countries. The authors found that the greater the financial pressures experienced by individuals, the more likely they were to apply to join the police. Thus, it is possible that the financial pressures experienced by participants in the current study—attributable to low-paying or poor employment opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador—made policing a more appealing career option.

In previous research, an important reason for LGBTQ people joining the police was to help people or the community (Couto, 2014). This was the motive stated by some participants in the current study. Participants in Couto's (2014) study also indicated nonaltruistic goals, including being attracted to the paramilitary nature of policing; a desire for an exciting career; and an interest in fulfilling a childhood dream. Career opportunities, job security, and adventure were the

three commonly identified nonaltruistic motives that participants in Colvin's (2015) study gave as reasons for joining the police. Colvin (2015) also reported that civic duty was ranked second as a motivation for lesbians to join the police force, and third for gay men. One participant in the current study mentioned not being motivated by altruism, though she recognized the importance of police officers doing good for others and the community. Most important for her was that the job fit her lifestyle.

Regarding their workplace experiences as lesbian and bisexual female officers, participants were unequivocally positive in their responses. None reported any negative experience relating to their sexual orientation or being out at work. They described a family-like work environment where they felt welcomed and accepted by colleagues. Being female was the more challenging issue (Couto, 2018). It was a common experience for them to be treated differently from their male colleagues who, the women sometimes felt, were perceived as more able to handle themselves on the job, such as when responding to an alarm call.

They did not report experiences relating directly to their identity as lesbian and bisexual female officers, yet their sexual orientation was leveraged by their male colleagues to hold conversations linked to the sexual objectification of women. Straight male colleagues would sometimes engage them in conversations about the sexual attractiveness of women, both inside and outside of the locker room, forcing them to assert that they did not share those views. In this way, the participants' sexual orientation became a convenient pretext for their male colleagues to reinscribe a culture of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which served to uphold gender/sexual boundaries that still positioned women—regardless of sexual orientation—outside of the old boys' network and as objects of male sexual desire and pleasure. To some degree, these experiences mirrored those reported by Myers et al. (2004), who found that gender discrimination and homophobia in policing compounded the experiences of lesbian officers. Those officers described an overwhelming feeling of being seen by male colleagues as objects to "fuck," or having to prove themselves as female police officers. Male officers did not have to negotiate such gender-based experiences.

Burke (1994) argued that lesbian officers may experience fewer tensions at work because they are stereotyped as masculine, and therefore conforming to traditional macho police culture. Couto (2018) has suggested that LGBTQ female officers have to conform to the masculine norms of their police organizations by acting tough. However, this was not the overt sentiment found in the present study, for two possible reasons. First, participants were out at work, whereas in Couto's study this information was not evident. Because their sexual orientation was already known and accepted by colleagues, there was perhaps little or no pressure for them to act tough or masculine.

Second, participants found their confidence was a contributing factor to their generally positive experience at work. Exuding confidence sent the message that they were not to be crossed. In this way, participants constituted themselves as having agency, which allowed them to maintain a coherent sense of identity and also deal with workplace black humor. Lesbian and bisexual female officers perceived as less confident might be made to feel responsible for their negative treatment, instead of having attention focused on the employer's responsibility of addressing potentially toxic work behaviors.

Consistent with previous research, participants also viewed the workplace as much harder for gay men than for lesbian and bisexual female officers (Miller et al., 2003). Whether intentionally or unintentionally, police culture was thought to deter gay men from coming out. The perceived hypermasculine character of the workplace was understood to tacitly shape attitudes and behaviors that normalized cultural expectations of a nongay masculine identity. These expectations were reflected in how gay men were reportedly talked about at work, such as on patrol, for example. The effect of hegemonic masculinity, or what has been referred to in the literature as the "cult of masculinity" (Silvestri, 2017), may help to explain the lack of self-identified gay and bisexual male officers in the current study. Although participants referred to a well respected and

out gay officer in a senior command rank, perhaps as evidence of progress, this officer's experience cannot be generalized to other gay or bisexual male officers in the organization who were not in a leadership position or had to work in contexts where their colleagues might make homophobic comments. According to the author of a post published in the *Harvard Business Review*, 71 percent of LGBT employees in senior management positions were out (Hewlett, 2011). It is possible that being in a senior leadership position provides a protective advantage that can shield one from the homophobic messages that junior-ranked gay officers, who choose to remain closeted, might be exposed to.

Colvin (2015) reported that LGBTQ officers might encounter work-related barriers due to their sexual orientation; while gay officers may be more likely to report barriers to equal employment, lesbian officers seem to experience or witness lower levels of employment-related barriers or discrimination. The current study does not support this previous finding. The participants' reported culture of acceptance and a seniority-based system for career-related opportunities and promotion might help to explain the difference in findings. Today there is an observed gap in LGBTQ officers among senior ranks, possibly because policing may not have been seen as an appealing career choice in the past, since LGBTQ people were traditionally not accepted in policing and were subjected to police violence (Mallory et al., 2015). Participants did raise the concern that since their limited years of service would underqualify them for many opportunities or promotions, the seniority-based system could be contributing to the near invisibility of LGBTQ officers in senior ranks. Diversity measures would support early opportunities for career development and promotion of LGBTQ officers into senior ranks.

Charles and Arndt's (2013) finding that institutional support can go a long way toward creating a police culture of acceptance was supported by the current study—all participants agreed that police leadership had been effective in promoting the workplace inclusion of LGBTQ people. The creation of the LGBTQ diversity committee, comprising senior command and rank-and-file officers, was evidence of the organization's commitment to being welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ people. However, individuals still needed to be held responsible for any offensive or derogatory treatment of officers who identified with or were perceived to be LGBTQ people.

Despite participants' acknowledgment of the efforts being made to include LGBTQ officers in the workplace, they also agreed that there was room for improvement. Perhaps external rather than internal motivations could be driving current change efforts (see also Jones & Williams, 2015), one said, so that the police could be seen as progressive by the public. Such performative diversity, it was suggested, concealed the frustration among police members over the LGBTQ community's proposed ban on uniformed police in Pride.

As with all research, our study is not without limitations. First, the sample was small and consisted of only lesbian and bisexual female police officers who were White. It did not include accounts of gay, bisexual male, and transgender officers. Thus, findings cannot be said to reflect the realities of all LGBTQ police officers in the RNC, White or non-White. This is an issue for police leadership, with implications for their development of LGBTQ-inclusive workplace policies. Only participants with positive experiences chose to participate in the study, perhaps influenced by recent initiatives taken by the RNC to promote a LGBTQ supportive workplace culture. Moreover, because the study focused on LGBTQ officers, the perspectives of heterosexual cisgender officers were not considered. Future research could explore how heterosexual cisgender officers view their LGBTQ colleagues. This line of inquiry could further advance knowledge about LGBTQ officers' experiences in the workplace.

Implications and Recommendations

Knowledge of the reported motivations for why participants joined the police (financial reasons, dynamic and nonrepetitive work, and personal fit) could be used to connect with and recruit

more LGBTQ people into policing (Elntib & Milincic, 2021), which could have the effect of increasing their representation in the frontline and leadership roles. We would recommend studying whether job satisfaction diminished (or not) over time with motive fulfillment (Elntib & Milincic, 2021), and possible implications for recruitment and retention of LGBTQ officers.

Even where workplace policies promote gender equity, stereotypes related to gender can operate at an implicit or unconscious level to uphold a hypermasculine culture (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), potentially deterring the advancement of women in policing. Although participants spoke positively about their workplace experiences as lesbian and bisexual female officers, they reported being perceived as less capable of police work than their male colleagues, due to their gender. Such possible gender-based bias and discrimination can undermine support for a gender-inclusive workplace and reinforce the view that women are not suited for policing (Veldman et al., 2017).

Stereotypical, traditional notions of masculinities in policing would be challenged if impacts on policewomen of the hypermasculinity in police culture were confronted. The macho image associated with policing operates as a barrier to women, who are seen as not measuring up in performing policing tasks due to sex- and gender-role typecasting (Bikos, 2016; Couto, 2018). Normalizing expectations of policewomen as capable professionals with valued skill sets, such as the ability to use communication to de-escalate and diffuse potentially volatile situations (Bolger, 2015) or to use weapons and excessive force less often than male officers (Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2005), could change police culture for the better. It could shift organizational culture away from assumptions about women's competency and ability, transgressing boundaries that limit men and women to their traditional traits. Such confrontation could also reduce the reluctance of gay or bisexual male officers to disclose their sexual orientation for fear of negative career impact or being perceived by peers as feminine or weak (Collins & Callahan, 2012; Colvin, 2015; Mennicke et al., 2018).

Participants acknowledged that police leadership had taken positive steps toward creating a diverse and more inclusive workplace culture, thus conveying the message to LGBTQ sworn police and civilian employees that they were valued. However, actions and inactions risk undermining progress, jeopardizing the gains made. Therefore, we recommend that police leadership:

Continue to support and promote the LGBTQ diversity committee as a communication channel for identifying and responding to LGBTQ issues, which may impact workplace environment and productivity. Such a committee could be effective in deliberately eliciting feedback from LGBTQ members on actions that could support gay and bisexual male officers in becoming comfortable with acknowledging their sexual orientation at work.

Offer ongoing professional development training to improve police members' understanding of implicit or unconscious gender bias and discrimination, to align policy and practice expectations on gender equality in the workplace, and communicate a zero-tolerance stance for violators.

Devise strategies to proactively combat homophobic and transphobic attitudes at all levels of the organization, especially on patrol. One way to do this would be to create an awareness campaign that educated and challenged non-LGBTQ officers to think about how their attitudes and actions (e.g., verbal comments) could be harmful to colleagues who might or might not identify as LGBTQ, and to LGBTQ community members. To keep the message of the awareness campaign fresh in officers' minds, it should be supplemented with ongoing LGBTQ training done in partnership with members of the LGBTQ community. This kind of collaborative training could help line officers and supervisors to understand the barriers faced by LGBTQ people in accessing public safety services; allay stereotypes; and support LGBTQ people, by using affirming language that is sensitive and respectful of trans- and gender-diverse people in the community.

Take steps to improve police and civilian personnel's understanding of how decisions are made regarding improving diversity and inclusion in the workplace. This could alleviate concern regarding the influence of external forces as motivating factors for organizational change.

Formalize the position of the LGBTQ liaison officer, to ensure continuous community policing support to members of the LGBTQ diversity committee and the broader LGBTQ community. This could help to address, among other things, current tension over the ban on uniformed police at Pride. When such formalization is made, senior command should communicate that throughout the organization.

Collect and analyze disaggregated workforce data to better understand how well (or not) the organization is doing in reflecting the communities they serve. Such data could then be used to improve the recruitment, hiring, and retention of police officers from historically underrepresented groups such as LGBTQ people.

CONCLUSION

Overall, we found that the culture of policing at the RNC promoted a workplace in which lesbian and bisexual female officers felt welcomed and valued. We could not ascertain the quality of the workplace environment for transgender, gay, and bisexual male officers, given their lack of participation in the research. Assumedly, such officers would benefit equally from the general actions taken by police leadership to promote LGBTQ inclusivity at work. However, the fact that none participated in the study invites the obvious question—why not?

Emerging from the research was a shared perception that the existing police culture perpetuated forms of hegemonic masculinity, reproducing traditional gender roles for women regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and regulating the cultural ideal of manhood for gay male officers. This culture ran counter to the goal of diversity and inclusion that the RNC sought to promote. Individuals needed to be held accountable for their role in creating a work environment that undermined women's agency or was discriminatory and paternalistic toward them. The same commitment must be made to foster attitudinal and behavioral change in the workplace, so that known or suspected gay officers would not be harmed by indignities or insensitive comments—intentional or not—made by others. Many police organizations such as the RNC are committed to embracing diversity and inclusion in all aspects of their operations; this commitment must be matched by concrete actions and strategies.

Notes

1. *Visible minority* is the term used by federal agencies in Canada, in connection with the *Employment Equity Act*, to describe people who are not Indigenous and White in race. Included in the category of visible minorities are South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, and others. The term is contested, and seen by many as outdated, in that it ignores the changing demographics of Canadian society. Visible minorities are, for example, the majority population in some provinces and cities across the country. Also, the term is criticized for disregarding the fact that race and ethnicity are social constructs; that barriers are rooted in historical and contemporary racial and cultural prejudices and are not a product of identities. We use the term in the current article only to be consistent with common parlance.
2. Gray literature is defined here as academic research, produced in print or electronic formats, that is not under the control of commercial publishers (Paez, 2017).

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