

Gay and Lesbian Issues in Policing

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Introduction

It is axiomatic to state that police agencies need to accept, and respond to, diversity — whether based upon ethnicity, gender or sexuality — both within and external to their occupational environments. Among many diversity issues that have gained attention is the treatment of, and response to, the lesbian/gay community by police, as well as similar corresponding issues related to the reported negative treatment of gay and lesbian police and attempts to address their needs internally.

The present article focuses upon providing a descriptive discussion of these external and internal gay and lesbian issues in policing. The discussion is divided into five independent, but interrelated lines of inquiry. Section one outlines the history of relationships between police and lesbian/gay communities and methods by which police have addressed apparent problems. Section two reports how police agencies have responded to their gay and lesbian personnel. The third section draws upon the author's own research, outlining the methods by which the Australia Federal Police has attempted to address gay and lesbian issues, with section four reporting selected results of a qualitative project undertaken to investigate the experiences of lesbian and gay AFP personnel. The final section concludes by highlighting general themes evident from the preceding discussion.

External Issues: Lesbian/Gay Communities and the Police

Relationships between police and gay communities have been far from co-operative or harmonious (Baird 1997; Buhrke 1996; Burke 1992; Freeman-Greene 1997; Richardson, Smith & Alexander 1997; Rosen 1980-81; Thompson 1997; Tomsen 1993). Historically police agencies have exhibited and condoned unwarranted and inappropriate attitudes towards gay groups, and have responded indifferently or inadequately to hate motivated crimes committed against lesbians and gay men (Baird 1997; Burke 1993; Freeman-Greene 1997; Tomsen 1993, 1997a).

The preconditions for the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York, which have been credited as initiating the modern gay liberation movement, was ongoing police harassment, with the major catalyst for the riots being repeated raids on the Stonewall Tavern (Kinsman 1996; Rosen 1980-81). Instances of violence in response to repression and injustice have not been limited to American jurisdictions. For example the 1978 Sydney Mardi Gras riots have been regarded as directly related to heavy handed police tactics directed at both Mardi Gras participants and onlookers (Carbery 1995; Tomsen 1997b).

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One source of tension in gay/police relations is the fact that historically police were charged with enforcing laws prohibiting consensual homosexual conduct. Employment of covert enforcement practices such as entrapment and surveillance instilled high levels of distrust among gay communities (AFP 1997b; Buhrke 1996; Freeman-Green 1997; Thompson 1997). Even after law reforms saw consensual homosexual activity decriminalised in most Australian states during the 1980s, police agencies still use clandestine surveillance and law enforcement techniques against gay communities, with 'beat' users being a constant target (Freeman-Green 1997; PLGLC 1997b; Sarre & Tomsen 1997; Seabrook 1992; Swivel 1991).¹

Recent research has suggested that lesbians and gay men perceive police as both unwilling and lacking ability to serve their communities. Among those who have been victims of crime, levels of non-reporting to police are high, with failure to report often being attributed to concern about police attitudes towards homosexuality (Australian Law Reform Commission 1995; Baird, Mason & Purcell 1994; Comstock 1991; GLAD 1994; Cox 1990; Lesbian & Gay Anti Violence Project 1992; PLGLC 1997a). Gay men and lesbians who do report incidents of victimisation recount indifferent or biased responses, with negative experiences being perceived as arising from anti-homosexual sentiment (Australian Law Reform Commission 1995; Baird, Mason & Purcell 1994; GLAD 1994; PLGLC 1997a). The most disconcerting aspect of this research is that gay men and women also report harassment and violence — including verbal abuse, threats, physical and sexual assaults — at the hands of police themselves (Baird, Mason & Purcell 1994; Baird 1997; Comstock 1991; Cox 1990; GLAD 1994).

Recruits to Australian police agencies have predominantly been males drawn from the working class, who have historically held inflexible notions about sexual expression and identity (Connell 1995; Tomsen 1997b). As Burke (1992, 1994) argues, the lack of harmony between the police and gay communities should come as no surprise: with homosexual activity seen as a threat to the 'moral order' that police officers perceive themselves as protecting. Further friction is generated through the conservative and masculine aspects of police culture (Burke 1992, 1994; Fielding 1994), and tendencies among police to juxtapose homosexual activity with inappropriate and illegal behaviour (Praat & Tuffin 1996). Hence the negative predisposition that police members have tended to manifest towards lesbians and gay men is not unexpected, with any emphasis towards improving co-operation with lesbian/gay communities seen by some rank and file officers as 'symbolic of much that is wrong' with current directions in policing (Tomsen 1997b).

Pressures to improve the relationship between police and lesbian/gay communities have been reinforced by the adoption of the community policing paradigm, and the growing size and political strength of the gay community (Baird 1997; Thompson 1997; Tomsen 1993). Community policing places emphasis upon consultative and pro-active measures, and requires police to become more aware of local community problems (Nixon & Reynolds 1996). While there is some debate and concern about the ways that Australian police agencies have adopted and conceived the community policing model (Sarre 1996), this shift has seen many forces attempt to assess and address the law enforcement requirements of a range of community groups. In conjunction with this shift in police practices, some gay and

1 'Beats' refers to a public location (e.g., park, street or public toilet) where men meet for sex or to organise sex (PLGLC 1997b; Swivel 1991). Police agencies, through the use of agent provocateurs, attempt to entrap beat users. This is based upon inducing a behavioural offence, the aim of which is to charge men who attempt to procure sexual activity with an offence, such as indecent behaviour in a public place (PLGLC 1997b; Sarre & Tomsen 1997; Seabrook 1992).

lesbian activist groups have demanded more effective police responses to relevant victimisation (PLGLC 1997a; Tomsen 1997a, 1997b).

The impetus to improve police/gay relations and reform police practices has been channelled mainly through the establishment of gay community liaison committees, and the nomination of senior police officers to liaise with the gay community, and be contacted on gay and lesbian issues (Baird 1997; Boek 1997a; PLGLC 1997c; Sarre & Tomsen 1997; Thompson 1997).

However, it appears that having a nominated police officer who is available to be contacted on gay and lesbian issues has not increased the willingness of some police jurisdictions to take pro-active measures to improve the level of co-operation with the gay community (Baird 1997; Thompson 1997). Nominated police personnel typically have a number of job responsibilities, with their liaison work taking low priority (Boek 1997a; Thompson 1997). Liaison committees also appear to provide inadequate structures for effecting change in police practice (Boek 1997a; PLGLC 1997c; Sarre & Tomsen 1997). Furthermore as Tomsen (1993) points out there are contradictions in claims by police that they are addressing concerns of the lesbian/gay community, when at the same time they ignore the ways that police organisation and culture impact negatively upon lesbians and gay men.

Variations in the willingness of police agencies to employ mechanisms that bridge the gap with lesbian/gay communities are illustrated in the example of NSW and Victoria. Of all Australia's forces, the NSW police service is by far the most advanced in developing a formal policy to address concerns raised by the lesbian/gay community. It has gone much further in developing on-going liaison and protective strategies than other police jurisdictions (Thompson 1997; Tomsen 1997b). This initiative has been publicly endorsed and supported both by the NSW premier and police minister (Thompson 1997). A number of other States and Territories have launched pilot schemes replicating the NSW model (AFP 1996c; Queensland Police Service 1998; Thompson 1997). The NSW strategy involves such initiatives as the creation of a full-time civilian position whose role is to initiate, develop, implement and monitor police programs, policies, and operations towards improving police relations, service and safety for gay men and women, and the establishment of 160 gay and lesbian liaison officers (PGLLOs) across NSW (Boek 1997a; Thompson 1995, 1997).²

Victoria Police on the other hand has questioned whether the lesbian/gay community in Victoria is in need of any specialist police response (Boak 1997a; PLGLC 1997c). Relationships between Victoria Police and the lesbian/gay community began to deteriorate after 1994, when members of the Victoria Police raided Tasty, a gay and lesbian night club and strip searched 463 patrons.³ The legacy of this raid is still evident in the high level of mistrust the lesbian/gay community has of Victorian police (Freeman-Green 1997). Victoria Police has refused to work with the Police Lesbian and Gay Liaison Committee (PLGLC) established by the gay community to improve relationships with Victoria Police.

2 Further elements of the NSW initiative include community education campaigns in schools, wide spread community consultation, training and education of police recruits and PGLLOs, public support of gay issues, participation in gay community events, increased police presence at gay venues, hosting of seminars on police gay/lesbian liaison and recruitment strategies targeting lesbians and gay men (Thompson 1995, 1997).

3 Victoria's Ombudsman concluded that the raid had been influenced by prejudices against homosexuals, with evidence emerging that police had used derogatory language against patrons. The raid has resulted in Victoria Police subsequently paying out between \$4.5 million and \$6 million in legal costs and settlements to more than 240 patrons (Freeman-Green 1997; Groves 1995).

This is despite a high level of awareness and exposure of the PLGLC within the lesbian/gay community (PLGLC 1997a, 1997b). In late 1997 the Victoria Police's only nominated representative on gay and lesbian issues was suspended from involvement on the PLGLC (Joyce 1997; PLGLC 1997d). This occurred following allegations of misrepresentations made by both the police representative and members of the liaison committee (Boek 1997b; Joyce 1997; PLGLC 1997d; Studdert 1997).⁴

The historical relationship between police and lesbian/gay communities and the attempts to address problems, raise corresponding interrelated issues of how the police have treated and responded to their own gay and lesbian members.

Internal Issues: Gay and Lesbian Police Personnel

Evidence suggests that lesbian and gay police personnel fare no better than the general gay and lesbian population when it comes to experiencing anti-homosexual sentiment in their occupational environment. Indeed studies have indicated a range of prejudicial behaviours and discriminatory practices in such workplaces (Buhrke 1996; Burke 1993; Jones 1996; Leinen 1993; Miller 1995).

The most extensive investigations of the experience of gay and lesbian police have been carried out by Burke (1993, 1994) in the United Kingdom and Leinen (1993) and Buhrke (1996) in the United States. Gay and lesbian officers reported that they were subject to indirect and direct, overt and covert harassment and discrimination, with the most common forms of workplace prejudice and discrimination being subtle, covert and indirect, such as gay slurs and anti gay humour being vocalised or surreptitiously scrawled on locker room walls or doors, harassing telephone calls and rumour mongering (Burke 1993; Leinen 1993).

The origin of this negative treatment can be linked to the development of policing along military lines that emphasise collective values as opposed to the expression of individuality. This has meant that police agencies have had difficulty in accepting internal diversity (AFP 1997b; Brown & Campbell 1994). Popular stereotypes of male homosexuality see it as the antithesis of the 'machismo' commonly embraced within police cultures (Brown & Campbell 1994; Burke 1992; Fielding 1994; Praat & Tuffin 1996). While this helps explain difficulties that male homosexual police experience, other elements of police culture — for example the misogynistic and patriarchal values towards women and the exaggeration of heterosexual orientations — contributes to the intolerance towards lesbian police members (Burke 1993; Fielding 1994; Leinen 1993).

The consequence for lesbian and gay police is that they 'closet' themselves — concealing their sexual identity from work colleagues — and 'pass' as heterosexual (Burke 1993, 1994; Cherney 1998a; Leinen 1993; Herek 1991). Burke (1994) argues that attempts by non-heterosexually defined police officers to 'pass' present substantial risks to their mental health and ability to function comfortably within the police environment, while giving maximum consideration to their duties. It also can affect their capacities to form or

4 A representative of the PLGLC had his membership withdrawn from the Victoria Police Ethical Standards Consultative Committee after raising concerns about Victoria Police using its disciplinary procedures and policies to censor internal dissent. The origin of these events lies in the disciplining of two police officers who publicly responded to the admission by Victoria's Police Minister, Bill McGrath, in February 1997, that he held great reservations about the existence of gay and lesbian officers in the Victoria Police, and the subsequent support by the Victoria Police gay and lesbian representative for the disciplinary action taken against those officers (Boek 1997c; Freeman-Green 1997; PLGLC 1997d).

maintain satisfying personal relationships. Passing can lead to feelings of alienation in the workplace, which in turn can create stress and undermine job satisfaction (Ellis & Riggle 1995; McNaught 1993; Kendall 1996).

Police agencies have not remained ignorant of the necessity to address the needs of their gay and lesbian personnel, nor of the fact that they can make a unique contribution, particularly in communicating and working with minority community groups (see Burke 1993). Methods of achieving this include the implementation of equal opportunity programs and legislation and establishment of internal support groups for lesbian and gay members.

Equal opportunity legislation and programs focus on eliminating workplace discrimination, and attempt to encourage the development of a more inclusive workplace. Principles of equal opportunity have been embraced by a range of police agencies (Gibson 1999; Haldane 1995; Walklate 1996), which see them as key ways to influence the organisational environment in which police culture operates (Fielding 1994; Walklate 1996).

Internal support structures for lesbian and gay employees have been important in indicating that police agencies are genuine about addressing issues of diversity within the organisation. Their goals are typically focused upon providing peer support for lesbian and gay officers, enhancing the status of lesbian and gay men in the work place, and working towards equal opportunity for lesbian and gay police employees (GOAL 1996-98; LAGPA 1994; New South Wales Police Employees Network 1997). They can also pay dividends in terms of improved gay/police community relations and greater willingness by gay/lesbian members to 'come out' in the workplace, thereby reducing the stress associated with concealing their sexual orientation and improving their productivity (Cain 1991; Burke 1993; Boek 1997b; Ellis & Riggle 1995). Indirectly, they can also help overcome negative police attitudes towards homosexuals. Research clearly indicates that heterosexuals who know someone who is gay are more likely to hold favourable attitudes towards lesbians and gay men generally (e.g., Herek & Glunt 1993; Herek & Capitano 1996).

While the developments outlined above are encouraging, experience in Victoria and some other jurisdictions suggests that many police agencies continue to be reluctant to embrace mechanisms that foster diversity within their occupational environment (Boek 1997c; Burke 1994; Folkes 1992; Leinen 1993). Remarks in 1997 by the Victorian Police Minister, that he had 'great reservations' about the presence of gay and lesbian officers in the Victoria Police (Green & Costa 1997) provoked criticism as to the commitment Victoria Police had towards diversity issues (Boek 1997c). Two serving police officers were disciplined for describing the Ministers remarks as 'extremely disappointing' (Green & Costa 1997; Jones 1997; Trueman 1997b). In 1997 Victoria's Gay and Lesbian Police Employees Network (GALPEN) was denied authorisation to use the Victoria Police logo in its banner; thus being the only Victoria Police Club to ever have the use of the logo withdrawn (Trueman 1997a).⁵ Furthermore, while agencies may, at the policy or management level, profess to be more 'gay affirmative' such reforms often can be circumvented by policing's occupational culture, which consistently obstructs substantive reform (Brogden & Shearing 1993; Chan 1997; Etter 1995).

5 However, there are indications of a positive shift in attitudes and policies. The Victorian Commissioner of Police has acknowledged that relations between the police and gays and lesbians had been 'strained' in the past, with a new Victoria Police Equal Opportunity strategy tackling lesbian and gay issues (Gibson 1999).

Research on the treatment of lesbian and gay police reveals themes of abuse combined simultaneously with tolerance and acceptance (Burke 1993; Cherney 1998a; Leinen 1993). It is clear that the negative treatment of lesbian/gay communities has correspondingly been reflected in the internal treatment of lesbian and gay police members. However just as external gay and lesbian issues have been addressed, police agencies have likewise responded to internal issues. One Australian police agency that has done exactly this is the Australian Federal Police.

The AFP's Responses to Diversity: Addressing Gay and Lesbian Issues

The AFP's main responsibility is to pursue Commonwealth law enforcement interests, with it also having a general community policing responsibility in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Since its inception in 1979 the AFP has been subject to constant reform. This has been reflected in the rapid organisational change that has seen the AFP transformed from a traditional paramilitary organisational structure — typified by a hierarchical system of command and control — to a flattened rank based structure.⁶ Further reform has also led to the adoption of a teams based approach to policing operations (AFP 1996a; Browne 1995; Change Implementation Team 1995).⁷

The AFP's attention has been drawn to internal and external gay and lesbian issues through a number of reviews that have indicated its occupational culture has the capacity to encourage offensive behaviour, particularly towards women and minority groups. In 1995, consultants Carmel Niland and Associates carried out an audit of the AFP's Equal Opportunity program. It reported that the ability to meet program objectives was poor, with the AFP's organisational culture producing 'a climate conducive to sexual and racial harassment' (AFP 1996a:7).

Niland and Associates (1995, 1996) found AFP occupational culture to be heavily masculinised, devaluing the job competence and ability of female members, antagonistic towards quotas for racial minorities, and lacking respect for the individual — to become accepted, people of different cultural backgrounds had to become assimilated into the dominant culture. The final conclusion of Niland and Associates (1995:9) was that the climate within the AFP was not one in which increasing the diversity of its work force could easily take place.

An external review carried out by the Australian Law Reform Commission (1995, 1996) revealed that the AFP's relationship with the lesbian/gay community within the ACT was characterised by hostility and mistrust. The Commission revealed evidence of antipathy towards gays by AFP officers. Lesbians and gay men in the ACT reported incidents of verbal and physical assault and entrapment in the context of the policing of beats. The Commission found reluctance among the lesbian/gay community to report incidents of victimisation, due to an impression of the AFP as homophobic. The Commission also reported that gay and lesbian AFP personnel experience forms of harassment, the

6 This has seen the AFP abandon rank titles in favour of the generic term 'federal agent'. The only exceptions have been in the ACT and its United Nations operations (AFP 1996a; Palmer 1996).

7 It is impossible in the space available to outline the history of organisational reforms the AFP has undertaken. For those interested in these reforms refer to the following sources: AFP (1996a, 1997a, 1998); Browne (1995); Change Implementation Team (1995); Chappell (1996); Donovan (1995); Directions in Government (1992); Etter (1995); Johnson (1992); Palmer (1996).

consequence of which was seen as forcing lesbians and gay men to hide their sexual orientation at work or face the possibility of discrimination.

The AFP, in response to these inquiries, established an Equity and Diversity Unit, whose responsibility is the development, implementation and co-ordination of an Equity and Diversity Program. The overriding aim of this program is to instil attitudes and practices that allow space for individual differences in gender, sexuality, ethnicity, language, cultural background and disabilities, and that are not distorted by inappropriate assumptions or stereotypes about particular community groups (AFP 1996b).⁸

The emphasis upon targeting the needs of gay men and lesbians as a component of the AFP's Equity and Diversity Program is illustrated by the AFP's development of a Gay and Lesbian Contact Officer Scheme and a Gay and Lesbian Police Employees Network (GALPEN).

In 1996 the ACT region piloted a Gay and Lesbian Contact Officer Scheme. This was deemed a success, with its permanent establishment underway (AFP 1996d; Cherney 1999; Severs 1996). Its main focus was on changing perceptions the ACT lesbian/gay community had of the AFP by providing a channel of communication for reporting relevant crimes, and demonstrating a supportive police presence (e.g. through attending gay and lesbian community events). The scheme also was concerned to provide peer support to gay and lesbian AFP personnel, educate colleagues about gay and lesbian issues, and contribute to the improvement of the AFP's training environment as a means of improving service delivery and changing the AFP culture (Severs 1996). Evaluation revealed a moderate level of support internally, with increased understanding among police officers of issues affecting gays and lesbians in the ACT (AFP 1996d; Severs 1996).⁹

Recognising the value of the ACT contact officer scheme, other regions in the AFP, at the national level, expressed interest in an extension of the concept (AFP 1996d). This resulted in the establishment of a Gay and Lesbian Police Employees Network (GALPEN), which was fully endorsed by the AFP National Management Team and sponsored by the Commissioner. The AFP's GALPEN is modelled upon similar bodies in policing jurisdictions both elsewhere in Australia (see Miller 1995; New South Wales Police Employees Network 1997) and overseas (see Burke 1993). Its objectives are: to provide assistance to gay and lesbian personnel in the AFP; to promote awareness and education of the diversity of AFP personnel both within the organisation and the wider community; to provide a contact point with the lesbian/gay community; and to collect and disseminate relevant information and network with other state, national, and international organisations which have similar interests and objectives (AFP 1996b:31-32).

Initial resistance was encountered in the implementation of the Contact Officer Scheme and GALPEN. These arose from staff attitudes, with official implementation only being possible after a change in AFP management both at the national and regional level (AFP 1996c).

8 In an attempt to limit the article to the most pertinent issues, elaborate discussion of the AFP's equity and diversity program is avoided. For an outline of the programs, aims and initiatives undertaken by the Equity and Diversity Unit refer to the following sources: AFP (1996a, 1996b); Australian Law Reform Commission (1995); Campbell (1995); Newton (1995); Palmer (1995).

9 Specific incidents dealt with by the contact officer included the assault and harassment of a number of gay and lesbian individuals, responding to the needs of a mental health patient suffering from HIV/AIDS, attending gay and lesbian community events, and assisting the NSW Police Service in a successful murder investigation (Severs 1996).

In the context of providing protection against discrimination and an avenue through which to take action, s 36A(3) of the *Australian Federal Police Act 1979* (Cth) outlaws discrimination upon the basis of sexual preference, embodying EEO principles as stipulated for all Commonwealth government agencies (AFP 1996a, 1997b).

The AFP's program to address gay and lesbian issues acknowledges that both externally and internally they are of particular relevance to its occupational environment. However, while the AFP may profess to be gay affirmative at the policy level, the filtering of this official policy into the workplace environment has to at least be considered. The experiences of the AFP's gay and lesbian personnel provide one basis upon which the efficacy of this response can be evaluated.

The Experiences of Gay and Lesbian AFP Personnel

This section reports the results of a qualitative project undertaken to explore the problems experienced by lesbian and gay AFP personnel. In light of the reported negative treatment of gay and lesbian police outlined above, and the fact that inquiries have indicated the AFP manifests traits antithetical to diversity, it could reasonably be assumed that its gay and lesbian members would encounter intolerance within the workplace towards their identity status.

There are many methodological difficulties in conducting research on gay and lesbian experience, owing to the fact that many lesbians and gay men conceal or 'closet' their identity status in social settings, which makes selection for research purposes difficult (Cherney 1998b). The present research relied upon self-selected volunteers obtained through informal networks. AFP members of GALPEN, and Gay and Lesbian Contact Officers acted as the initial means of recruiting interviewees. This resulted in the method of sampling favouring individuals who were more open about their sexual orientation. Of the seventeen AFP interviewees, twelve were female and five were male.¹⁰ These facts lend encouragement to possible objections that the research fails to adequately capture the experiences of gay men, or those lesbian and gay members who 'closet' or conceal their identity status within the workplace.¹¹

This does not totally invalidate the projects results. Rather than attempting to discover the average experience, the research attempted to capture the diversity of experiences. It is not claimed that the narrative data reported here is representative of gay and lesbian police.

Interviewees expressed a range of motivations for joining the AFP. Among the motivations disclosed were the desire to fulfil a life long ambition, job flexibility and lifestyle changes. Despite these motivations a number of lesbian and gay members reported being apprehensive about their decision to enter the AFP. Respondents who had recognised and openly identified themselves as gay or lesbian before joining were mindful of the existence of anti-homosexual sentiment, and were aware that other AFP members would possibly react negatively if their sexuality became known:

10 Due to confidentiality issues the author was unable to identify the particular region a respondent was drawn from, making cross jurisdictional comparisons impossible.

11 A range of steps were undertaken in order to improve the validity of the research results. This included conducting interviews with officers from two State police jurisdictions in order to compare the AFP sample with their State police counterparts, so to identify commonalities in experiences and concerns, enabling generalisations to be made. See Cherney (1998a) for an outline of the methodology employed in the main research project. Also see Cherney (1998b) for a discussion of methodological difficulties in investigating gay and lesbian experiences of anti-homosexual sentiment.

I was concerned about how the issue of my sexuality would be dealt with. This feeling was related to general social attitudes about gay people, but I was particularly aware of the negative attitude of the police towards gay people (male respondent).

I was apprehensive about joining. It was a paramilitary organisation and I knew that being gay would not be accepted. I also knew lesbians who were already in the job and they were closeted due to attitudes in the AFP (female respondent).

A limited number of respondents reported no conscious apprehension relating to their acceptance in the workplace. However they had been aware of the negative value likely to be placed upon their sexual identity. Not only had they anticipated some adverse reaction should they be 'discovered', but they had been aware of the need to 'develop an act to fit in'.

Very few respondents reported being subject to any form of direct hostility or vilification arising from their sexual orientation. The following are among the few incidents disclosed during the research that illustrated overt intolerance of, and hostility towards, homosexuality:

At happy hour I was told, I know you're a poofter, I won't have a poofter work with me, go out and get yourself a girl friend (male respondent).

I remember being addressed by a superintendent where the issue of my sexuality was raised. He stated, 'now about your sexuality'. From then on the conversation just deteriorated. When I worked in **** certain members would come in and make snide remarks about being a lesbian and make reference to what the job is coming to (female respondent).

All respondents reported experiencing incidents that were more indirect, subtle, surreptitious and covert in nature, originating dominantly in rumours and innuendo, with the gay and lesbian community the target of verbal denigration:

I've heard general comments made about other gay male members ... They're typically degraded ... In any job involving gay people their sexuality is commented upon in a degrading way ... I hear from close colleagues how other members refer to me as a dirty lesbian, however people will not openly confront you, it's always done behind your back (female respondent).

Nothings ever done directly it's usually indirect like often by coincidence you'll overhear things or calls are made out across the room. Typically they involve reference to homosexual acts made in a degrading way. It's always done behind your back (female respondent).

Some interviewees saw such behaviour as part of the job, that it had to be 'put up with', and that one could either condition oneself through ignoring it and 'getting on with their job', or confront the behaviour. The latter course was perceived as possibly provoking direct hostile incidents:

In the context of working with other male members you're going to hear certain types of jokes, innuendo and derogative remarks. You condition yourself to ignore these sort of things rather than taking them on (male respondent).

When hearing comments directed to other gay members I feel I'm unable to respond due to fear of either outing the individual or confirming what other members suspect. Responding can have adverse consequences (female respondent).

While the above negative experiences are less direct and overt than physical or verbal denigration, their psychological impact can be as serious. They indicate an implied intolerance towards homosexuality, and can work their effects through informal communication networks.

While there was no indication that lesbian and gay personnel in the AFP were subject to systematic forms of anti-homosexual sentiment, responses do indicate some institutional or

cultural animosity towards their identity status. The majority of participants described their experiences in the AFP as 'fairly positive', with reported examples of anti-homosexual sentiment being regarded as isolated episodes. However this does not mean that pockets of anti-homosexual sentiment do not exist: while an organisation may not be overtly intolerant of homosexuality, informal networks may exist that do not accept or tolerate diversity. For example an number of interviewees referred to the existence of a ubiquitous group within the AFP's occupational culture termed the 'old guard' or 'boys' club' that encouraged and supported negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, with other minority groups also the target of their animosity.

Respondents reported a perceived necessity to self censor or 'closet' themselves in the workplace — concealing their sexual identity from work colleagues. Rationalisations originated in an awareness that the AFP's occupational culture was intolerant of homosexuality, and fear associated with the uncertainty of how others would respond if they became aware of the participant's sexuality. This pressure to conceal their sexual identity was reported as impacting upon the participant's mental health and workplace relationships:

I feared being victimised if I came out. I was aware of the boys' club mentality that existed, that homosexuality was not accepted. I was aware of other gay people who had had negative experiences. I also feared losing existing friends. I thought they wouldn't like me if they found out and I feared the possibility of being denied opportunities, so I remained closeted for some time (female respondent).

Concealment was exhausting; it mentally takes up much of your energy and attention. You are constantly worried that something you say or do will be interpreted correctly. You're worried you'll be picked, that they will see through your disguise (male respondent).

Lesbian and gay AFP members who were quite open about their sexual identity in the workplace reported that they had received positive responses from colleagues when their sexual identity had become known, which they reported as surprising as they expected colleagues to react negatively. Significantly, participants' perceptions of their merit and authority were conceived as mediating the success of self disclosure, overriding or neutralising the issue of their gay or lesbian identity as a discredited status:

For me coming out was liberating and dead easy once I reached a certain point. Now I can just be myself, I can have telephone conversations over the phone with my partner and work colleagues can hear and I don't have to care. It's made me more like one of the boys at work in that now I am able to participate in the life of the office without being afraid, I found myself almost like a celebrity. I'm able to participate much more openly in the office, people actually seek you out when you think they won't even eat lunch with you. It's put me on a different plain of expectation at work, colleagues see me in a different light. The reaction was surprising. I did expect a negative reaction, however I'm sure my professionalism has assisted in others overlooking that I'm gay and accepting me on my merit (male respondent).

My experiences in coming out in the AFP were fairly positive ... I chose carefully who I told ... I think what helped was that I had proved my merit so there was less of a focus upon personality issues (female respondent).

What was particularly poignant in the experiences of lesbian AFP personnel was the mediating effect of their gender upon the attitudes they faced in the workplace. Female participants reported confronting sexist attitudes that were directed mainly at their gender status:

A lot is said about being female. I don't think there are any extra obstacles to being a lesbian because I've heard men make fun of a woman for just being female, just as much as they

will make fun of a woman for being a lesbian. It's automatically assumed that men can cope with the job, that a woman has to be tested and prove she can cope. I've had to put up with verbal abuse because of being female. As soon as a woman is put in charge the first thing the men say is 'who did she sleep with?' I've never seen any female promoted that hasn't had some sort of connotation attached to her promotion (female respondent).

I constantly hear males say about a highly ranked female that she's got there on her back. They're only seen as token. Women in the AFP face a number of problems, and male members can be very degrading to women. In the work environment women are seen as only acceptable in those female type jobs such as typing etc, and were often not considered for job promotion (female respondent).

Both GALPEN and the AFP's Equity and Diversity Program were perceived by participants as indicating that the AFP was gay affirmative in policy, with both initiatives 'recognising that lesbians and gay men exist in the AFP'. Both were perceived as fulfilling a range of important needs, with the schemes regarded as having flow-on effects in other areas:

It provides a support network, provides support which is connected to mental health issues, provides protection and support for those coming out. It indicates that the AFP is representative of the general population and recognises the existence of gay and lesbian officers and acknowledges their existence. Indicates that those coming out in the AFP are accepted ... It illustrates that the AFP is a progressive organisation (female respondent referring to GALPEN).

The provision of peer support was recognised as being of particular value to new gay and lesbian members. Reflecting back upon their earlier experiences and apprehensions, participants made reference to how supportive an organisation like GALPEN would have been:

I'm aware that other officers are apprehensive about being gay in the AFP and that those new members who are gay or lesbian face great problems. This is where GALPEN plays an important role (female respondent).

It lets people know that if you are gay or lesbian you have got support and that people who have come out are not going to be discriminated against. It tells those who are not gay or lesbian that we are normal people; breaks down stereotypes; that there's no need to be afraid of us ... I never knew there were any gay or lesbians out there when I joined ... It would have been nice to know that there was someone out there like myself (female respondent).

The introduction of the Equity and Diversity Program and other associated affirmative action and EEO policies were regarded as important indicators of the AFP's commitment to addressing a range of educative issues and unacceptable workplace practices. However reference was made to the existence of the 'boys' club' or 'old guard' as having the potential to undermine benefits from such policy changes. Participants expressed concern that such policies had limited capacity to change the 'mind set' that pervaded the 'old guard' or 'boys' club': the threat of 'the big stick' could compel behavioural change but leave attitudes unchecked:

There is value in addressing the high degree of ignorance that exists. You have to start somewhere and E&D programs contribute to desensitising members against the influence of the boys' club. Part of the boys' club will always be with the AFP, and you cannot push change down their throats, because the old boys club don't want to change, so you have to do it slowly and let them absorb it. E&D policies allow you to do this. Once they are aware of E&D it will stop some forms of discrimination. While the old boys' club may not agree because they are set in their ways, they will respond to authority and abide by the legislation (female respondent referring to the AFP's Equity and Diversity Program).

The policies will force people to make changes. People will realise that practices that occurred in the past are no longer acceptable. However people may be forced to say and do the right thing, but attitudes may not have changed (female respondent referring to the AFP's Equity and Diversity Program).

The overall effect of the AFP's Equity and Diversity Program and the associated legislative and policy initiatives were judged as having some impact upon the AFP culture. A number of participants felt that attitudes had changed in the AFP since they first joined — citing the attitudes of newer recruits. However, it is difficult to determine whether this change was a direct result of equity initiatives (Cherney 1999). Changing social attitudes and the increasing acceptance of gays and lesbians also featured in the interviewees' impressions. A number of participants conceded that the 'change process' would be slow with aspects of the AFP's organisational culture, i.e. the 'old boys' club', particularly resistant to reform:

It's a step in the right direction. I have found among new members and some older members that they are more accepting of minorities. Originally when I joined there was a white anglo culture where people were treated differently on the basis of their skin or sexuality. However there has been a definite change with the shift in management policy, hence it's important that it be supported. However I don't have confidence in middle management supporting it; but as they leave and others move up in the ranks, attitudes and practice will change. But still there exists the dinosaurs who believe in the old way of doing things (female respondent).

A new generation is coming in and replacing the old dinosaurs who are leaving. They are being replaced with people who have got positive and tolerant attitudes towards gays because they have come across gays in their environment. Because the dinosaurs never did, gays were always closeted (male respondent).

Conclusion

Historically, police agencies have had poor relationships with lesbian/gay communities. This legacy has also been reflected in an occupational and cultural environment that has had difficulty in accepting diversity amongst its members. However, while there are variations in the extent to which police jurisdictions have responded to these issues, significant attempts have been made to rectify apparent problems.

The AFP is one such police jurisdiction that has addressed gay and lesbian issues both internally and externally. Its gay and lesbian members report similar problems as lesbian and gay police from other jurisdictions. These relate to such issues as experiences of anti-homosexual sentiment, concealing their sexual identity in the workplace, and their corresponding consequences (Burke 1993; Leinen 1993).

Despite these negative experiences, gay and lesbian AFP personnel perceived their workplace environment as progressively accepting of diversity. They emphasised that their identity status does not necessarily undermine their overall perceived quality as a police member. Importantly their meritoriousness can neutralise the social stigma associated with being gay or lesbian. This highlights the importance of developing inclusive workplace environments that encourage lesbian and gay police to 'come out' and disclose their sexual identity. This provides a basis upon which they can achieve their productive potential, which makes the process of 'coming out' far easier.

The AFP interviewees highlighted the importance of gay affirmative policy prescriptions, as well as peer support through such initiatives as GALPEN, which have an

important communicative effect. They verify that the AFP recognises and is amenable to accommodating differences among its employees.

One important lesson highlighted by the interview data is that despite policies to eliminate intolerant behaviour and practices within the workplace, entrenched residual opinions can still prevail. This was evident in the experiences of female interviewees, and references relating to the attitudes of the 'old guard' or 'boys club' towards diversity issues. These may well be the legacy of wider social intolerances and prejudices. While such opinions may be suppressed through the threat of official sanctions, they can linger below the surface.

Ultimately all police agencies will need to reverse their historical neglect of the wider gay community if they are to adequately respond to the needs of their gay and lesbian employees. Likewise if law enforcement bodies cannot address the situation of gay men and lesbians within the organisation, how then are they to overcome similar barriers that prevent them from responding to the gay community overall?

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