

Officer Friendly and the Tough Cop: Gays and Lesbians Navigate Homophobia and Policing

Kristen A. Myers, PhD

Northern Illinois University

Kay B. Forest, PhD

Northern Illinois University

Susan L. Miller, PhD

University of Delaware

ABSTRACT. Despite attempts to expand social diversity, policing is still dominated by a white, masculine, heterosexual ethos. As a consequence, employment of lesbians and gay men as police officers may be especially threatening to members of this occupation. Within the context of potential hostility and homophobia, nontraditional officers must negotiate their contradictory presence on the police force. This paper in-

Kristen A. Myers is Associate Professor of Sociology at Northern Illinois University. Kay B. Forest is Associate Professor of Sociology at Northern Illinois University. Susan L. Miller is Associate Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice at the University of Delaware. The authors would like to thank Carol Walters and Rita Potter for their research assistance, Sergeant Dorothy Knudson for her support, the members and friends of the Chicago Lesbian and Gay Police Association for their participation in the research, and Jim Thomas and Maureen Sullivan for helpful comments on an earlier draft. Correspondence may be addressed to: Kristen A. Myers, PhD, Zulauf Hall 806, Department of Sociology, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115.

Journal of Homosexuality, Vol. 47(1) 2004
<http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JH>
© 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.
Digital Object Identifier: 10.1300/J082v47n01_02

investigates that negotiation. Using the Bem Sex Role Inventory and open-ended survey data from a sample of “out” and “closeted” gay and lesbian police officers, we ask how gays and lesbians manage their images as “good cops” in the face of gender norm violations associated with their sexual orientation. Our findings indicate that masculinity and femininity do not hold together in a cohesive, dichotomous manner for these officers. Instead, other characteristics that enhance policing are emphasized to support their occupational competence. These officers see themselves as “good cops.” The gendered/sexualized character of their self-perceptions appears to matter less than the context of the job, more than for a comparison sample of heterosexual police officers. We conclude that although gay and lesbian officers see their sexuality as an occupational asset, they are also likely to work harder to prove themselves as crime fighters. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Masculinity, femininity, policing, gays, lesbians, hetero-gender, gender, homophobia

INTRODUCTION

The field of policing is still dominated by a white, masculine, heterosexual ethos (Messerschmidt, 1993). Policing requires officers to encounter dangerous situations and to depend on each other for support in potentially life-threatening situations. Police officers are expected to enact what Connell (1987) calls “hegemonic masculinity,” which is a Western, capitalist interpretation of masculinity associated with authority, aggressiveness, technical competence, and heterosexist desire for and domination over women. Hegemonic masculinity depends on the devaluation of all femininities as well as subordinated masculinities, including “gay masculinities” (Connell, 1992). Hegemonic men bond together over the overt sexualization of women and through gay bashing (Messerschmidt, 1993). Employment of lesbians and gay men as police officers is thus especially threatening to those in an occupation that values “traditional masculinity and middle-class morality” (Shilts, 1980). Until recently, being an openly gay or lesbian officer was not an option in police organizations: It meant dismissal from the job (Doss, 1990). Indeed, research indicates that homosexuals are the social group most disliked by police (Burke, 1994). Nevertheless, as some police departments have moved from

traditional crime-fighting models to develop closer ties between the police and communities, a growing number of gay men and lesbians have entered the policing ranks (Meers, 1998; Miller, 1999). This paper explores how these nontraditional officers negotiate and adapt to a potentially hostile and homophobic work environment.

Homophobia is built into policing on three levels, according to Burke (1994). First, police are highly conservative as a group. Conservatism among police officers, as with members of the military (Estrada and Weiss, 1999) and the general public (Harris and Vanderhoof, 1995), is related to strong anti-gay sentiment. Second, there is a strong subculture of machismo among police officers, and behaviors perceived as feminine are disdained. Third, a police officer's job is to regulate all deviance—including homosexuality. These three factors combine, discomfiting gay officers' negotiation of their work and personal lives. Homosexual officers themselves may internalize homophobia due to the proscriptions of their job. Burke observed,

An officer's personal values and ideologies may, with time, become increasingly conservative as they become entwined with those values that the law attempts to uphold. Non-heterosexual officers are therefore attempting to reconcile their sexual orientation with knowledge of the way that gay communities are regarded by their peers, often empathizing with such judgements and (mis)understandings as a result of their own conditioning and police experience. (p.197)

Negative perceptions of gays and lesbians are exacerbated by society's rules about gender. Society conceptualizes gender as a strict dichotomy (one is either masculine or feminine with no in-between), and everyday people regulate and sanction even the mildest gender deviance (Thorne, 1995; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Lesbians and gay men are often stereotyped as ultimately deviant: They are considered by many in mainstream society to be "gender inverts" (Wong et al., 1999). For example, popular culture portrays gay men as overwhelmingly effeminate, and lesbians as hypermasculine (Connell, 1992). If we are to agree with this distorted image, then both groups are gender violators, although, ironically, lesbians should be more in line with the masculine requirements of policing (Martin, 1980).¹ Homophobia is embedded in society's binary conceptualization of gender (Bem, 1993; Gagne et al., 1997; Ingraham, 1994; Wong et al., 1999), which affects lesbian and gay officers' image as professionals, as well as their respect and safety on the job (Praat and Tuffin, 1996).

Our research emerges from a critique of the gender binary, and we investigate the negative impact of gendered sexual stereotypes among gay and lesbian police officers. As Wong et al. (1999) report, "Research addressing gender-related self-perceptions among homosexuals suggests that the implicit assumption of gender role inversion is a stereotypical response set with ques-

tionable external validity” (p. 21). In this paper, our primary research question is the following: How do gays and lesbians manage their images as “good cops” in the face of assumptions about gender norm violations associated with their sexual orientation?

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND POWER

Most gender scholars today agree that gender is a social construction that is contextually specific (see Connell, 1987; West and Zimmerman, 1987; and Lorber, 1994, for examples). That means that gender is more than just a personality characteristic: It is also performance, social structure, and identity—all of which may vary in salience according to the situation. Some social scientists argue that the conceptualization of gender is grounded in heterosexism and homophobia. Ingraham (1994) argues that the gender dichotomy only makes sense if it is situated in the context of heterosexuality. That is, a presumed sexual attraction between men and women drives our notions of masculinity and femininity, as well as our theories to explain gender inequality. The gender construct thus helps make women’s subordination to men seem natural and necessary. Ingraham introduces a new concept, “heterogenders,” which makes heterosexuality an explicit mechanism in gendered interactions and structures. In this view, “gender” is problematic because it disguises heterosexism while simultaneously reproducing homophobia through the polarization of men and women as natural opposites. As Wong et al. (1999) argue, in addition to enforcing inequality between men and women, the gender dichotomy also helps to regulate sexuality.

These recent theoretical insights build upon pioneering work of the 1970s on sex roles. In the early 1970s, Sandra Bem (1972, 1974) developed the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Bem’s scale tested respondents on 60 different attributes—20 reflected the culture’s perception of masculinity, 20 reflected a shared perception of femininity, and 20 were fillers. Rather than treating masculinity and femininity as two poles on the same continuum, Bem created separate scales for masculinity and femininity. Her major innovation was acknowledging that people may be *both* masculine and feminine, rather than either/or. This challenged notions of a fixed polarity between masculinity and femininity, arguing that few people actually fit the social “standards” associated with their sex. Instead, most people are “androgynous,” or somewhere in between. The BSRI helped revolutionize the way social scientists approached gender as a concept, and it also helped reduce the stigma for those—which is to say, most of us—who did not fully conform to their respective gendered poles.

In more recent literature, the BSRI has come under attack. Bem (1993), herself, is one of the leading and most constructive critics of the BSRI. Because the Bem score allows for a self-reported description of a person’s gendered

personality, it has limited uses for understanding the social process of gender construction. Significantly, Bem acknowledges that the scale omits power relations and inequality. More importantly, the scale “reproduces . . . the very gender polarization that it seeks to undercut” (p.124), by taking masculinity and femininity as conceptually given. There is no analysis of the context of enactment– or enactment itself—at all. Ironically, masculinity and femininity are treated as static, dichotomous traits. On the surface, then, the Bem scale is antithetical to a social constructionist perspective.

This does not mean that the BSRI is no longer useful. Although scholars largely agree that gender is more contextually situated than the BSRI would indicate, most people in American society *still operate* as if gender is a reified, natural dichotomy (Bem, 1993; Gagne et al., 1997). People in most situations are expected to fit the dichotomy, lest they be cast by others as deviants. We believe that the BSRI can be used to measure the degree to which respondents subscribe to essentialist notions of gender, and to examine whether respondents’ gendered self-perceptions are affected by the pressures of the context (for another example of a social constructionist use of the Bem scale, see Risman, 1998).²

Bem’s (1993) concept “gender schemasticity” describes the “internalizing of the gender polarization in the culture, the learned readiness to see reality as carved naturally into polarized sex and gender categories” (125). Thus, we use Bem in order to understand gender schemasticity. We do not intend to reify masculinity and femininity. Instead, we look at the ways gay and lesbian officers understand and negotiate their gender identity in an environment that falsely reduces gender to naturalized traits.

Officers’ gender schemasticity is shaped by the heterogendered expectations of their job. As Acker (1990) argues, most jobs are structured with the assumption that the worker is a [straight] man, although the structure creates the facade of gender neutrality. All workers operate within the context of gendered organizations. When jobs are evaluated, they are measured by a set of responsibilities and attributes that befit the job in the abstract. It is up to the worker to conform to the job, not vice versa. In policing, an unwritten job requirement is the successful enactment of hegemonic masculinity (Burke, 1994; Messerschmidt, 1993, see also Connell, 1987). While all jobs are evaluated by a masculine standard, policing more overtly demands conformity.

Part of our employment of the BSRI, then, is to examine gay and lesbian officers’ responses to the demands of this masculine standard. We hardly expect these women and men to passively accept policing tradition as immutable. At the same time, by the very demands of the job, policing requires a degree of conformity in terms of skills and attributes. Elsewhere, we show that this same sample of gay and lesbian officers are both aware of patterns of social exclusion in the policing context as well as loyal to policing organization (Miller et al., 1997). This study extends that research by asking how these officers, consciously and unconsciously, shape their own gender schemasticity within this

contradictory context. Given the strong subcultural pressures within policing to conform to hegemonic masculinity, as well as the presumed connections between “appropriate” gender enactment and sexuality, how do gay and lesbian police officers (both out and closeted) perceive themselves?

As we shall see, our findings are consistent with Bem’s own critique of the BSRI: Masculine and feminine characteristics do not hold together in a cohesive, dichotomous manner for the officers (see also Finlay & Scheltema, 1991, 1999). Instead, the characteristics that enhance policing are emphasized to support their occupational competence. These police officers see themselves primarily as “good cops.” The gendered/sexualized character of their self-perceptions matters less than the context of the job.

METHODS

Data Collection

This study focuses on police officers in a large Midwestern city with a police force of 12,000. Our sample includes both gay and lesbian officers ($n = 17$) as well as heterosexual male and female officers ($n = 54$) as a comparison group. To make contact with gay and lesbian officers, we approached the cofounder and current codirector of the Lesbian and Gay Police Alliance (LGPA) in the Midwestern police department with our ideas. She agreed to assist us in distributing the survey to all law enforcement members of the LGPA ($n = 25$) and “vouched” for our support, objectivity, and sensitivity. In turn, we received strong cooperation from the LGPA membership.

Although there are currently fifty members of the LGPA, only 25 are police officers from the Midwestern police department; the remaining members are from suburbs, other cities and towns in the state, as well as a few members from other Midwestern states. Thus, the sample was not randomly selected; individuals volunteered to participate. All data were gathered through a survey process rather than by direct contact or interviews. To fully capture the extent of gay and lesbian officers’ perceptions, beliefs, and experiences, we designed a twenty-two-page questionnaire consisting of primarily open-ended questions. Questions addressed officers’ perceptions about (1) stereotypes surrounding gender identity and sexual orientation, (2) their working environment, (3) their strategies for coping with workplace barriers, and (4) their perceived effectiveness in police work. The in-depth nature of the questionnaire resulted in respondents offering a vast amount of material beyond the typical results of close-ended survey instruments. There was ample space for responses, and the respondents were encouraged to provide as much detail as they wished.

We provided the home phone number of one of the authors in case a respondent felt reluctant about participation and needed reassurance. For clarification purposes, we also asked the respondents to include their phone numbers if

they felt comfortable being contacted by us. Five respondents did so and were later contacted by one of the authors to provide further information on topics that were unclear or incomplete. We received 17 completed surveys, giving us a 68% completion rate from the Midwestern police department members of the LGPA. The sexual orientation of only eight officers in our sample is known at work. In order to assure confidentiality, self-administered questionnaires and postage-paid return envelopes were used, with the guarantee of respondent anonymity.

Despite what might seem like a small sample, given the relative rarity of gay and lesbian officers *willing* to discuss their sexual orientation and careers, these data are invaluable in contributing to our understanding of gay and lesbian police officers. Although there may be bias presented by using surveys with sensitive populations, even when open-ended questions are constructed, we made every effort to minimize bias by cross-validating information with our (gay) contact officers, and telephoning respondents to probe for additional information when we were able to do so. Because our sample includes officers who have varying “out,” “closeted,” and “semi-closeted” statuses, as well as varying racial and ethnic identities, we can be reasonably confident that their responses capture the range of possibilities within this population. The 68% response rate is sufficiently robust, given the sensitive and hidden population (Renzetti, 1992).

To sample heterosexual police officers, we relied on a student connection, whose brother-in-law asked his colleagues to fill out the questionnaire at roll call. For this part of our sample, we administered a modified closed-ended questionnaire that included the BSRI along with several other questions about police work.

Sample

Nine lesbian officers completed the questionnaire. Seven are white, two are Latina, and their ages range from 25 to 42. Two are single, while seven are engaged in long-term live-in relationships with their same-sex partners. Eight women indicated that they had some college education, and one had received a B.A. Together, they have had between 2 and 13 years of experience on the Midwestern police force, and all except one has served in the capacity of patrol officer. All but one lesbian officer are “out” to some degree on the job.

Eight gay male police officers also completed the questionnaire. Three are white, one is black, three are Latino, and one is Asian. Their ages range from 30 to 40. Two officers are single, while the remaining six are in long-term, live-in relationships with their partners. Four officers completed some college, two have an associate’s degree, one graduated from a four-year college, and another has completed a master’s degree and is continuing with additional postgraduate study. All together, they have between 1 and 26 years of experience on the police force, and all served in the capacity of patrol officers (al-

though two have achieved a rank above patrol officer positions). Five of the eight gay male officers are not “out” to anyone at work, not even a partner.

Our sample is unusual in that all of the lesbian officers and seven out of eight gay male officers have received awards, honors, or special recognition from the police department. According to our contact on the force, it is fairly common for officers to receive Honorable Mentions (reflecting solid, good police work in making burglary or robbery arrests, for example) and Letters of Commendation. The officers in our sample, however, also received more infrequently awarded honors, such as the Outstanding Community Service Award, various commendations for taking actions beyond the call of duty, Life Saving Award, and the Class Commander in Academy (meaning that the officers achieved the highest academic standing in their group). Our sample of gay and lesbian officers is not large, and our results are not, therefore, generalizable. However, our data provides insight into the struggles experienced by lesbian and gay officers.

Twenty-two heterosexual women completed the questionnaire. Thirteen are white, five are black, two are Latina, and one is biracial. They range in age from 23 to 52. Six are married, four are separated or divorced, seven are single, four are in long-term committed relationships, and one is widowed. Eight of these women had some college, one holds an associate’s degree and one graduated from a four-year college. Their experience on the police force ranges from 1 to 20 years, and all but one is a patrol officer. All but two have received awards, honors, or special recognition from the police department. The vast majority of these are Honorable Mentions. One woman officer also received a Physical Fitness Award.

Thirty-three white heterosexual men officers also completed the questionnaire. They range in age from 29 to 60. Most are married, five are in long-term committed relationships, three are single, and two are divorced. All have been patrol officers, although six have achieved high rank as well. Time on the police force ranges from 4 to 36 years. Eight of these officers have attended some college, three hold associate’s degrees, five have completed four-year degrees, one holds a law degree, and one other has a master’s degree. All but two of the male heterosexual officers have received awards, honors, or special recognition from the police department. These included numerous Honorable Mentions and Letters of Commendation, as well as the Detective of the Year Award, the Outstanding Community Service Award, Life Saving Award, and the Governor’s Award.

Bem Sex Role Inventory

Using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), we examine officers’ gendered self-perceptions within the masculinist context of policing. First, we look at the conventional “lenses” of femininity and masculinity (Bem, 1993) that may be operating in officers’ image management. Doing so helps us to see the extent to which gender and sexuality are performative (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Seidman, 1998) rather than innate. Second, using factor analysis, we probe the

BSRI further to reveal underlying dimensions of *policing* characteristics that may build on yet move beyond traditional definitions of gender (Kurdek, 1987). Here we suspect that gay and lesbian officers will negotiate image management to maximize their own perceived personality strengths for police work (Martin, 1980; Miller, 1999), while minimizing those characteristics that reinforce popular cultural assumptions about stigmatized homosexual identities.

All respondents were asked to take the BSRI as part of the survey. The BSRI contains sixty adjectives or descriptive phrases. Together, these items are assumed to represent “two fully independent scales of culturally defined masculinity and culturally defined femininity, respectively” (Bem, 1993, 119). We use the BSRI here in much the same spirit intended by Bem when she wrote that sex-typed self-descriptions “enable us to look *at* the lenses of a culture rather than *through* them” (italics in the original, Bem, 1993, 127). In this way, we are able to see the organizing of reality around a core of gender schemasticity that is both process and product.

As we look at the men and women within the heterogendered police organization, an analysis of how and if they employ gender lenses in their self-descriptions may help us better understand the complex ways that “deviant” genders and sexualities must be negotiated. Thus our interpretation of the BSRI scores will not be grounded in the assumption of a set of static personality traits, but of the process of managing stigmatized social locations by constructing self to “fit the job” according to the constraints of police organizational logic (Acker, 1990). Our findings in this paper are based on the quantitative scores on the BSRI, plus qualitative responses to open-ended survey questions. We use pseudonyms when quoting the gay and lesbian officers.

Group Identity Variables. To represent the intersection of gender and sexuality in our sample, we constructed a Group Identity dummy variable. Sexual orientation expresses differently for men and for women. Gay and lesbian officers in our sample articulated the impact of these differences on them at work. Rose, a lesbian, said of straight male officers: “For some reason, they’d rather work with a ‘dyke’ than a ‘fag.’ It’s amusing.” George, a gay officer, suggested that lesbians would have an easier time in policing than gay men, because “women officers are more ‘expected’ to ‘be that way’ than men.” To better capture these complexities, we thus constructed a four-level dummy variable for ‘Lesbians,’ ‘Gay Men,’ ‘Heterosexual Women,’ and ‘Heterosexual Men.’ Because heterosexual men serve as the comparison group in the policing discourse itself, we used ‘Heterosexual Men’ as the omitted category in our analysis.

RESULTS

Bem Sex Role Inventory

In our first stage of analysis, we were interested in the gendered self-perceptions of the police officers in our sample. The BSRI fit our purposes for two

reasons: First, it is a self-report measure; and second, it represents a broadly accepted American cultural standard of conventional masculinity and femininity in the 1970s (Bem, 1993). In investigating the ways that diverse individuals who are situated within a traditionally hypermasculine occupation may consciously or unconsciously negotiate their gender schemasticity given the constraints of the workplace context, we regressed the BSRI on the Group Identity dummy variables. Our findings are reported in Table 1.

Consistent with our critique of the gender binary, we find that lesbians had the highest self-reported femininity (not masculinity) of all groups, significantly higher than that of heterosexual men. In contrast, gay men reported no more feminine qualities than straight men; in fact, their scores fell slightly below those of their heterosexual male peers. At the same time, none of our police officers differed significantly on self-reported masculinity. Within this narrow range, however, heterosexual women had the lowest scores while gay men reported the highest masculine characteristics.

The BSRI is intentionally constructed to conceal its intention of measuring masculinity and femininity, permitting an analysis of a respondent's implicit assumptions of gender schemasticity. The full paper-and-pencil test includes 20 masculine items, 20 feminine items, and 20 neutral items. Some of the gender-specific items are more obvious than others, but two are clearly tagged to gendered identity: Femininity (Item 20) and Masculinity (Item 40). We wanted to know how the officers' explicit gender self-perceptions compared to their responses on the full BSRI scale. Using the same model as in our previous analyses, we therefore regressed these two single items. The results are reported in Table 2.

TABLE 1. BSRI Femininity and Masculinity Scales Regressed on Group Identity Variables

Variables	Femininity Scale	Masculinity Scale
Constant:	4.63	5.34
Lesbians	0.93**** (.24)	0.52 (.33)
Heterosexual Women	0.43** (.17)	0.10 (.23)
Gay Men	-0.11 (.24)	0.51 (.33)
R-square	.23	.06
Adjusted R-square	.19	.02

(standard errors in parentheses). * p = .05 ** p = .01 *** p = .001 ****p = .0000

TABLE 2. BSRI Femininity and Masculinity Items Regressed on Group Identity Variables

Variables	Femininity	Masculinity
Constant:	1.24	6.70
Lesbians	3.46**** (.36)	-2.34**** (.46)
Heterosexual Women	4.56**** (.26)	-4.18**** (.33)
Gay Men	.17 (.34)	.45 (.48)
R-square	.79	.89
Adjusted R-square	.76	.76

(standard errors in parentheses) * p = .05 ** p = .01 *** p = .001 ****p = .0000

From Table 2, we can see that conventional masculine and feminine identities split more clearly along gender lines. In their explicit gender representations, the gay male police officers were no different than straight male officers. Similarly, lesbian and straight women police officers viewed themselves as distinctly feminine and clearly not masculine, although in both cases, the coefficient for heterosexual women was substantially larger than for lesbians. These findings resonate with Wong et al. (1999): These gay and lesbian officers were not “gender inverters.” Fitting heterogendered stereotypes may, in fact, be an asset for “out” gay cops. As Gail, an “out” lesbian officer explained, “I think at first the guys expected me to be rough and brutal—but I proved to be the opposite. One heterosexual male told me in private that he gives me a lot of credit for being so open.” Her level of femininity surprised and relaxed her male colleagues.

Nevertheless, these findings raise this question: What other personal characteristic items might have driven the responses on the BSRI scales, particularly for women police officers in our sample? Some of the items on the BSRI Femininity scale are inappropriate for police officers of either gender, such as “yielding” or “childlike.” Other items are highly desirable qualifications for all law enforcement officers, such as “athletic” and “forceful,” but are only included on the BSRI Masculinity scale. Because we are interested in how these officers construct their identities within the demanding context of policing, we are ultimately concerned with how their self-assigned attributes cluster with and without regard for conventional gender polarization. We decided to do a factor analysis of the full BSRI instrument in order to identify any subscales that might serve as clues.

Officer Friendly and the Tough Cop

For this second stage of analysis, we used a principal components analysis with a varimax rotation and limiting the results to four factors. We expected to isolate the main components of the BSRI Masculine, Feminine, and Neutral scales while allowing for some additional loading on a fourth factor.³

The factor analysis reproduced significant portions of the BSRI Femininity scale, but with some significant variations. The first factor included only 11 out of the 20 femininity items. Omitted were such attributes as “shy,” “flatterable,” and “gullible.” This factor also included some of the BSRI neutral items, such as “helpful,” “sincere,” and “friendly.” It is noteworthy that “feminine” did not load on the first factor, but it was one of the few items to load highly on the fourth factor, along with “masculine.” As a result, we decided to call the first factor “Officer Friendly.”

In a similar manner, many—but not all—of the BSRI masculine items loaded on the second factor. These included such items as “independent,” “forceful,” and “willing to take risks.” We named the second factor “Tough Cop.” A full list of each composite is listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Officer Composites

Officer Friendly	Tough Cop
friendly ⁿ	defends own beliefs ^m
helpful ⁿ	independent ⁿ
gentle ^f	assertive ^m
reliable ⁿ	forceful ^m
sympathetic ^f	strong personality ^m
sensitive to needs of others ^f	has leadership abilities ^m
understanding ^f	willing to take risks ^m
compassionate ^f	dominant ^m
sincere ⁿ	willing to take a stand ^m
eager to soothe hurt feelings ^f	self-efficient ^m
likeable ⁿ	acts as a leader ^m
warm ^f	individualistic ^m
tender ^f	ambitious ^m
affectionate ^f	aggressive ^m
yielding ^f	not shy ^m

m = masculine

f = feminine

n = neutral

In combination, these scales represent two distinct images that are remarkably parallel to two current and competing models of policing: the community/neighborhood police officer and the patrol officer. In recent decades, community policing has introduced a “feminine” paradigm of cooperation and community relationships into policing strategy (Miller, 1998, 1999). Compared to the detached and impersonal image of the traditional patrol officer, the ideal community police officer has a social-work orientation. We thus turn to a test of these scales regressed on our Group Identity variables in Table 4.

When we compared the results of the BSRI analyses with those of the Officer Friendly and Tough Cop scales, we found that two patterns in Table 1 were exaggerated in Table 4. First, the difference between the coefficients on the Officer Friendly scale for the two groups of women was greater than on the BSRI Femininity scale. The score for lesbian officers was highly statistically significant, while the mean score for heterosexual women officers was nonsignificant compared to that of their straight male coworkers. The gay male officers were also no more likely to be Officer Friendly than the heterosexual men, in contrast to findings elsewhere in the literature (see Kurdek, 1987). In addition, both gay men and lesbians scored statistically higher on the Tough Cop scale than heterosexual male officers, a pattern that was merely a trend in the BSRI Masculinity regression.

DISCUSSION

Due to the small sample size, we consider these results preliminary. However, they point to a dilemma that may well face nontraditional police officers

TABLE 4. Officer Friendly and Tough Cop Scales Regressed on Group Identity Variables

Variables	Officer Friendly	Tough Cop
Constant:	5.38	4.94
Lesbians	1.05**** (.28)	0.64** (.25)
Heterosexual Women	0.37 (.20)	0.19 (.17)
Gay Men	0.14 (.28)	.64** (.25)
R-square	.18	.14
Adjusted R-square	.15	.10
F-value	4.95	3.69
Significance	.004	.016

(standard errors in parentheses) * p = .05 ** p = .01 **** p = .001 *****p = .0000

who still must engage in the masculinist context of police organization. That is, people who are seen as outsiders in the heterosexual hypermasculine context of policing (including straight women, lesbians, and gay men) may feel pressure to conceptualize gender in such a way that conforms to the ideal. Moreover, none of these nontraditional group positions was quite the same. In terms of explicit femininity, straight women police officers saw themselves as highly feminine and decidedly not masculine. So did lesbians, although to a lesser degree on both counts.

A different story emerged when we compared our analyses of the BSRI Feminine scale and the feminized "Officer Friendly" scale. It appeared not to be perceived conventional femininity at work for the lesbian police officers, but some self-image defined more by a sense of compassion and openness (Martin, 1980; Miller, 1999). In their roles as cops, there may be little need for lesbians to conform to heterosexualized conventional femininity. However, lesbian officers may see themselves as expressive due to their role in working with the public. In contrast, the straight women police officers may perceive themselves in more conventionally feminine terms to compensate for any loss to their sense of heterosexual attractiveness that may result from being in the masculine role of police officer.

Gay men in this sample apparently faced another set of gender challenges. On both the explicit Masculine BSRI item (Table 2) and the Masculine BSRI scale (Table 1), gay men scored no differently than heterosexual men officers. These men resemble what Connell (1992) calls "very straight gays." Yet something else appeared in the "Tough Cop" scale analysis. Gay male officers "out-machoe'd" the straight ones. So did the lesbians. In fact, the heterosexual women officers showed a trend in the same direction. Together, this pattern suggests that nontraditional police officers, particularly those who are gay or lesbian, continue to feel like outsiders who must prove that they are, in fact, tough enough to be qualified for the job.

Overall, the results of our statistical analyses indicate that popular culture stereotypes of "gender inverts" simply do not hold among gay and lesbian police officers (Wong et al., 1999). Being gay—whether male or female—was the most important factor related to being a "Tough Cop." Interestingly, lesbian officers were likely to be "Officer Friendly," *and* they were likely to be "Tough Cops," even though these represent very different styles of policing. We draw upon qualitative responses to make sense of what could be a paradox in the quantitative data: How can an officer be both "friendly" and "tough?" On closer inspection, this contradiction makes sense.

Gendered Conundrums Faced by Lesbian and Gay Cops

What is clear from the data is that being gay was never out of these officers' minds. In a homophobic, hypermasculine climate such as policing, gay identity was constantly managed by the officers. Gay and lesbian officers knew

that straight officers interrogated their performance as police officers through a heterogendered lens. Juan described his experiences:

A couple of months ago, my watch commander told me that when I was assigned to the area, everyone was apprehensive and unsure about working with a “queer.” He said no one anticipated that I’d be a “good cop” or that I’d be an “alright guy.” Then he said, “You’re good people.”

As a means of coping with this scrutiny, gay and lesbian officers actively maintained a private/public split. Many described a need to separate their sexual orientation from their work—whether or not they were “out.” Michelle explained her choice to remain closeted:

I became a cop because this is what I always wanted to be; not because I was gay and thought that I want to be a “gay/lesbian cop.” I always felt that being gay was who I am in a private way. If being considered a gay/lesbian police officer is an advantage, why are there so many us not “out”? I feel that when the departments develop a real policy, meaning guidelines, insurance the same as for heterosexual families, government discrimination policies where we can feel that being out is an advantage, then most of us will be out.

The costs of being out to this officer were greater than the stress required to remain closeted. “Out” officers maintained privacy as well, because they feared repercussions at work. Martha went an extra step and actually closeted her police work: “I ask my close friends not to introduce me as a cop, and I try to steer conversations away from it.” She feared that her friends would see her as a traitor and exclude her from activities. So not only did straight cops distrust gay/lesbian officers, but gays/lesbians distrusted cops. This created a great deal of tension for the officers who crossed these boundaries. Maintaining privacy helped alleviate some tension. Burke (1994) calls this leading a “double-double life.”

Marginalization and Compassion

Several gay/lesbian officers in this study asserted that their unique standpoint positively affected their police work. As evidenced in the quantitative analysis, this trend was especially strong for lesbians. Anne said, “We as a people have been put down for so many years that I think a lesbian officer would have more compassion for people and a greater understanding for those who are oppressed.” Gail said, “I think we are more accepting of different ways of life and not so quick to judge.” Rose explained, “I believe that knowing how a society can push you aside and not care about you helps especially when dealing with lower income families and minorities, in general.” Being understanding and compassionate helped them to become “Officer

Friendlys.” They were able to focus on the empowering aspects of being lesbian/gay in a heterogendered occupation.

Although the gay male officers did not score high on the Officer Friendly scale, several, nevertheless, saw their homosexuality as an asset on the job. For example, Jim used his unique standpoint to reeducate homophobes:

I did a traffic stop (speeding) in the gay-identified beat on a car of white male teenagers. When I asked them why they were speeding, they said “to get away from the fucking faggots.” I said, “So let me get this straight: You drive real fast, breaking the law, to get away from the fucking faggots and then get pulled over by the fucking fag cop?” They were blown away, and I asked them what they had against gays, and how they let their fear drive them to even break the law.

This officer undermined and challenged their stereotypes. His sexuality was a positive resource for community police work. Charlie framed the issue in terms of personal growth: “Gay people who have come to terms with being gay to survive—we have had to struggle against the norms and are (or should be) stronger, independent people because of it.”

However, there was a double-edged sword to every aspect of being a gay/lesbian officer. What appeared to be an asset in community policing—compassion and understanding—could also be used against them by commanders, who feared that gay/lesbian officers would not be tough on gay offenders. Jim recounted his experiences with this paradox:

Initially, I was *unofficially* not allowed to work the gay-identified beat—they feared I would not take police action against another gay person *and* that I wouldn’t be able to control a gay crowd because I was one of their own and they wouldn’t “fear” me. I finally went to my LT and specifically asked to be assigned on a day with a big gay event, calling him on the unofficial rumored fears about it in front of other officers. He assigned me. I was FAB-U-LOUS and NOW it doesn’t matter. But I had to prove myself to them with other gay people and gay offenders. [Emphases in the original]

The paradox is compelling: Gay/lesbian officers’ experiences with marginalization made them more open-minded; but being open-minded might have jeopardized their police work. Thus, the officers were pushed to prove themselves according to the hegemonic male standard. This pressure is described in the next section.

Fitting In

As anticipated by us researchers, the gay/lesbian officers reported feeling pressure to conform to the status quo at work. Gay and lesbian officers had a

lot at stake when they put on the police uniform: Not only were they trying to prove themselves as good officers, but they were also working to contradict oppressive heterogendered stereotypes. As George said, "You have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good." When asked how gay/lesbian police officers validate their reputations as good officers, Jim responded:

As both women and Blacks did when they first entered the predominately straight white field of policing, by working very hard at being very good and effective. Not ratting out another officer (handle problems yourself whenever possible). I think everyone should strive to do a good job, and then gay people should actively use that good record to challenge others' misconceptions and prejudices head on.

Being a successful "Tough Cop" contradicted stereotypes. Therefore, many gay and lesbian officers may have endeavored to fit this standard. As with "Officer Friendly," gay officers' sexuality could also be a resource in being "Tough Cops." Lori related this incident:

One gang banger called me a lesbian, so I told him that his girlfriend (who had been on the scene earlier) had asked me for my phone number and was waiting for me at home because he never satisfied her. It was kind of unprofessional, but I was getting him back for being a jerk.

Here, Lori did not back down in the face of a homophobic attack, but instead turned the insult on its head to show she was not intimidated.

Gender discrimination compounded homophobia for lesbians. Consistent with the literature, the women officers reported that sexism pervaded police work. Margaret said, "[In society,] the amount of comments and actions that degrade women and define them as nothing but objects for men to fuck is pretty overwhelming. And then I go to work and encounter the same." This affected the ways that gay and straight women did their jobs. Margaret also argued, "I believe being a woman has had a much greater effect [than my sexual orientation] on the male officers' support and perception of me. I have to prove myself as a police officer *in spite* of being female" [Emphasis in the original]. This "proof" for lesbians often involved separating themselves from "typical" female officers. Rose explained,

I have worked with many men who refuse to work with female officers because the females are "always shopping." I have worked with females who respond only to low risk jobs and are more interested in writing parking tickets. I think if you have reputation of being a good cop, your sexual orientation will just be another part of you that will eventually be accepted.

Thus, lesbians felt extra pressure to prove themselves as women. Being a "Tough Cop" satisfied this challenge. As Lori stated, "When I'm at work, I'm an officer in blue, a team. Nothing else matters for those 8 1/2 hours."

ANALYSIS

The masculinist, homophobic police culture continues to put pressure on its officers. The lesbian and gay officers in this study were constantly on stage: While managing their gender displays on the job, they simultaneously monitored their displays of sexuality. Heterogendered prejudices made an already stressful job more difficult for gays and lesbians. However, whenever possible, these officers drew upon their personal characteristics as resources rather than liabilities. Overall, the data in this paper underscore Seidman's (1998) argument that sexuality is performative, just as gender is a performance (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Indeed, the performances are interconnected. Moreover, the process is complex and even contradictory.

On the one hand, our findings suggest that gay and, in particular, lesbian police officers emphasize the ability to bring an extra advantage to policing, based on their "outsider" experiences. At first blush, the lesbians in our sample also appeared to exaggerate qualities associated with conventional femininity (see Martin, 1980; Schneider, 1989). Yet closer analysis revealed a more cohesive perception of themselves as officers in the model of neighborhood policing: friendly, helpful, and understanding, particularly within communities where relations with traditional policing have been more antagonistic. It is noteworthy that our sample of heterosexual women officers did not share this "Officer Friendly" self-image, even though they rated themselves as highly feminine. One possible explanation is that these lesbian officers—*freed by the socialization experiences of their sexual orientation*—were less dependent on the more passive self-image of conventional femininity than the heterosexual women officers (Martin, 1980), and were thus able to reconceptualize "womanhood" in terms of a "different-voice" approach to policing (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1998). In addition, all but one of these lesbian officers were "out" at work, at least to a partner, giving them less reason to feign a heterogendered image (see Seidman et al., 1999).

At the same time, it appears that both gay and lesbian officers worked to contradict the notion that they weren't "real police," even more than did the heterosexual women officers. Compared to their heterosexual colleagues, both gay and lesbian officers were more likely to perceive themselves as forceful and assertive risk takers. Yet they didn't present themselves in more conventionally masculine terms, such as competitive, self-reliant, and self-sufficient. This suggests that rather than "proving masculinity," *per se* (Burke, 1994; Pharr, 1988), these officers were affirming themselves as "Tough Cops" who are qualified to do the job (see Finlay & Scheltema, 1991, 1999).

CONCLUSION

We conclude that heterogendered stereotypes *do* impact gays and lesbians' gender schemasticities within a hegemonically masculine context. Put simply, these gay and lesbian officers may actively negotiate their image management on the job to contradict prevailing negative stereotypes about "gender inversion" that continue to persist in the public mind. Most importantly, however, we assert that although the stereotypes interfere with officers' work, they do not prevent officers from conforming to the characteristics required to do a good job. We concur with Burke (1994) in asserting that being a "good cop" is the major driving force behind gay and lesbian officers' actions. Ironically, the consequence for including nontraditional groups in police organizations may not be the feared lowering of the standard for tough crimefighting (Powers, 1996). Rather, the consequence may be that the very populations who can help promote change within police organizations may feel too constrained by the tensions of gender and sexuality codes to optimize their potential.

NOTES

1. Indeed, Burke (1994) argues that lesbian officers, because they are stereotyped as masculine, fit with the macho subculture and therefore experience fewer tensions at work.

2. We are not alone in our interpretation of the BSRI's uses. Risman (1998), for example, uses the BSRI in her study of "men who mother." In this study, Risman examines the familial roles for which men are socialized. These roles typically do not involve housework, child care, intimacy, or overt displays of affection—roles that make up "mothering." Risman uses the BSRI to show that men actually possess many feminine characteristics, even when socialized as masculine. She argues that men *can* mother when the situation demands it. Risman's theoretical goal is to show how gender is interactionally situated rather than stagnantly fixed by socialization. Why then does Risman use the BSRI, which has been attacked for its stagnant portrayal of gender? She justifies using the BSRI, arguing:

BSRI measures are typically assumed to be individualist measures of personality characteristics—to pick up some internalized sense of self as masculine or feminine or both. My interactionist hypothesis, however, suggests that selves are created, sustained, and changed by ongoing, face-to-face interaction. Therefore, measures of self-identity cannot be assumed to be individualist personality measures. (p. 57)

Like Risman, we do not see the BSRI as individualist measures that treat masculinity and femininity as static, unchangeable entities. Rather, we see the BSRI as useful in deciphering people's gendered self-perceptions, as they are affected by the demands of social situation.

3. Factor results available from the authors on request.

REFERENCES

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4, 139-58.
- Bem, S. L. (1972). *Psychology Looks at Sex Roles: Where Have All the Androgynous People Gone?* Los Angeles: UCLA Symposium on Sex Roles.
- _____. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Clinical and Consulting Psychology*, 42, 155-62.
- _____. (1993). *The Lenses of Gender*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Burke, M. (1994). Homosexuality as deviance: The case of the gay police officer. *British Journal of Criminology*, 34, 192-203.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- _____. (1992). A very straight gay: Masculinity, homosexual experience, and the dynamics of gender. *American Sociological Review*, 57, 735-751.
- Doss, M.T., Jr. (1990). Police management: Sexual misconduct and the right to privacy. *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, 17, 194-204.
- Estrada, A. X., and D. J. Weiss. (1999). Attitudes of military personnel toward homosexuals. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37, 83-97.
- Finlay, B. & Scheltema, K. E. (1991). The relation of gender and sexual orientation to measures of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny: a further analysis. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 21, 71-81.
- _____. (1999). Masculinity scores as an artifact of feminist attitude: Evidence from a study of lesbians and college women. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37, 139-147.
- Gagne, P., Tewksbury, R., & McGaughey, D. (1997). Coming out and crossing over: Identity formation and proclamation in a transgender community. *Gender & Society*, 11, 478-508.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Harris, M. B. & Vanderhoof, J. (1995). Attitudes toward gays and lesbians serving in the military. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 3, 23-51.
- Ingraham, C. (1994). The heterosexual imaginary: Feminist sociology and theories of gender. *Sociological Theory* 12, 203-219.
- Kurdek, L. A. (1987). Sex-role self-schema and psychological adjustment in coupled homosexual and heterosexual women. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 9, 87-97.
- Lorber, J. (1994). *The Paradoxes of Gender*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Martin, S. E. (1980). *Breaking and entering: Policewomen on patrol*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Meers, E. (1998). Good cop, gay cop. *The Advocate*, March 3.
- Messerschmidt, J. (1993). *Masculinities and crime: Critique and reconceptualization of theory*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.
- Miller, S. L. (1998). The tangled web of feminism and community policing. In S. L. Miller (Ed.), *Crime, control, and women: Feminist implications of criminal justice policy* (pp. 68-112). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- _____. (1999). *Gender and Community Policing: Walking the Talk*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Miller, S. L.; K. B. Forest; and N. C. Jurik. (1997). Diversity in Blue: Lesbian and Gay Police Officers in a Masculine Occupation. Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Society of Criminology, San Diego.
- Pharr, S. (1988). *Homophobia: A weapon of sexism*. Little Rock, AR: Chardon.

- Praat, A. C., & Tuffin, K. F. (1996). Police Discourses of Homosexual Men in New Zealand. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 31, 57-73.
- Renzetti, C. M. (1992). *Violent betrayal: Partner abuse in lesbian relationships*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Risman, B. (1998). *Gender vertigo: American families in transition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Schneider, B. (1989). Invisible and independent: Lesbians' Experiences in the Workplace. In A. Stromberg & S. Harkess (Eds.), *Women Working* (pp.) Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing.
- Seidman, S. (1998). Are we all in the closet?: Notes towards a Sociological and Cultural Turn in Queer Theory. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1, 177-192.
- Seidman, S., Meeks, C., & Traschen, F. (1999). Beyond the closet? The changing social meaning of homosexuality in the United States. *Sexualities*, 2, 9-34.
- Shilts, R. (1980). Gay police. *Police Magazine* (Jan), 32-33.
- Thorne, B. (1995). *Gender play*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- West, C. & Zimmerman, D. H.. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1,125-151.
- Wong, F. Y., McCreary, D. R., Carpenter, K. M., Engle, A., & Korchynsky, R. (1999). Gender-related factors influencing perceptions of homosexuality. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37, 19-31.