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Chapter Twelve

Racial Minority and LGBTQ Cops

[12.0] Like the controversies and difficulties faced by women in policing, racial minority and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and questioning (LGBTQ) officers face similar issues. Similarly, central to this chapter is the idea of dual identities that often cause friction and stress for both minority and gay and lesbian officers: one as a member of a minority group and another as a police officer. Minority officers have been exposed to and have faced open as well as more subtle forms of racism which they are expected to tolerate and tacitly accept as part of the *blue brotherhood* and unwritten, yet powerful “blue wall of silence.” For lesbian and gay officers, the hyper-masculine and generally conservative police subculture often requires these officers to choose one identity while hiding another, or face consequences.

[12.1] Ironically, members of these minority groups, along with women, are some of the most highly sought-after individuals by departments and agencies driven to diversify under community policing to ameliorate the strained relationship and racial tensions between the police and public under professionalism during the reform era. Police departments in response to increased attention from a history of social upheavals sparked by real or perceived police misconduct, from the Watts Riots in the 1960s to Rodney King in the 1990s, and more recently, Ferguson in 2014, have sought to hire officers that better reflect community demographics as the solution.

[12.2] In principle, a more diversified police force will have a more profound effect on changing the police subculture. The police subculture is a form of group introversion formed from the shared experience of the perceived dangerous profession. The subculture often manifests in racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes among many officers, including management. For instance, the Warren Christopher Commission that investigated the Rodney King beating and ensuing Los Angeles Riots, found a culture of open racism that is



tacitly accepted by the higher-ups at the LAPD. Having women and minority officers, it was thought, would make police departments more sensitive to those officers who would not tolerate such attitudes. In principle, a critical mass of minority officers from all groups would weaken and eventually dissipate the subculture.

The benefits of hiring minority officers, at least in principle, include: **[12.3]**

- The minority officers better reflect the community which eases racial tension **[12.4]**
- Minority officers can better relate to the minority community **[12.5]**
- Removes language barriers **[12.6]**
- Removes cultural barriers **[12.7]**

Despite the apparent benefits of diversifying the department, changing the police subculture is much more complex and difficult. Increases in women, minority, and gay and lesbian officers has not been shown to weaken or eliminate the police subculture that has often been criticized for fostering racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes. Ironically, these officers from minority groups have often adopted the police subculture and the same attitudes and worldviews as their colleagues, demonstrating the robustness of the police identity. **[12.8]**



A SNAPSHOT OF POLICE RACIAL DIVERSITY **[12.9]**

Police officers in the United States are predominately White. In fact, they are disproportionately White in many urban areas, which is significant when one looks at places with high degrees of racial tension. Ferguson, Missouri, for example, in 2015 had approximately sixty-seven percent Black residents with a police force that was ninety-four percent White. Oftentimes it is the disparity between the dearth of minority officers in minority communities that is blamed as a major source of racial tension and possible social upheaval. **[12.10]**

The significant disparity between racial minority officers in areas *near* metropolitan areas is a growing concern among large police departments. According to the Brookings Institute, both big cities and their suburbs exhibit the large diversity gap, with a twenty to twenty-six percentage point difference between the minority population and minority officers, respectively.¹ Meaning, police departments would need to increase the number of minority officers by at least twenty percent to match the population percentage of minorities. It was found that eighty-three out of 122 agencies surveyed, or sixty-eight percent, had large diversity gaps. Some of the cities with the largest disparities between minority officers and percentage of minorities in **[12.11]**





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the population included Allentown, Pennsylvania, which had a forty-nine percent difference, Sacramento, California, with over forty-one percent, and Las Vegas, Nevada, with over thirty-five percent.

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Progress has been made in recent decades at hiring more minority officers. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in six officers was a racial minority in 1987, which increased to one in four by 2007. From 2003 to 2007, Hispanic officers rose from sixteen percent to nearly ten percent of the police force. According to the Department of Justice, in 2013, racial or ethnic minorities accounted for over one quarter (twenty-seven percent) of officers in local police departments.² Hispanic officers accounted for the biggest gain from 2007 to 2015 with a sixty percent increase. In 2015, Black officers accounted for approximately twelve percent of local police forces while Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans accounted for approximately three percent of local departments. Despite these increases, minority officers are primarily concentrated in larger cities and overall, the police force does not truly reflect the demographics of the population.

[12.13]

Hiring minority officers remains difficult for most departments. A 1993 study of 356 Albany, New York, high school seniors found that race had a statistically significant effect on applying to police departments.³ The seniors were asked whether they would accept a hypothetical police job offer. Black seniors were found to be less likely than White seniors to accept the job offer. When researchers broke down the variables that affected why Blacks were less likely to accept the hypothetical offer, it was found that it had to do with the culmination of negative experiences with and attitudes towards police as well as demographic variables. For example, Black seniors surveyed were less likely to report being stopped and questioned by police, they believed police treated minorities unfairly, and felt that Black and White officers did not get along on the job.

[12.14]

Despite the difficulties in hiring racial and ethnic minorities to the police force, efforts to recruit these officers by departments can be effective. Many departments in the 1990s paid for expensive television ad campaigns to attract women and minority officers, with limited success. This strategy later shifted to focusing on compensation and working conditions, such as time off and flexible schedules. A 2009 study confirmed this later strategy, finding that increasing starting pay resulted in more minority applicants but ultimately did not increase actual hires.⁴ However, the study found that increases in recruitment budgets were effective in gaining more minority and women hires. Departments that used proactive and tailored recruitment strategies targeting minority applicants resulted in more hires, which included women. This is in contrast to traditional methods of general recruiting coupled with preferential treatment for minority applicants, which showed to be ineffective.





REALITIES OF RACIAL MINORITY OFFICERS

[12.15]

The idea of creating a diverse police force that represents the diversity of the community is a murky concept when one considers all the levels of diversity. Take for instance, women officers as discussed previously. While we discussed some of the difficulties of being a woman in a predominantly male field and being exposed to sexist attitudes, we did not consider the ramifications of being a Black policewoman. Police researcher Barbara Price pointed out that there are even significant variations in experiences between female officers that are different races.⁵ She drew the differences between Black and White female officers, pointing out: **[AU: The following list was used previously on page 12 of Chapter 11.]**

[12.16]

- Black women feel they have to demand respect while White women are put on pedestals. [12.17]
- Black women report that their bosses don't send White women into high crime areas (but, by inference, do send Black women). [12.18]
- Black women report they have no one to help them secure desired assignments, special training sessions or promotions; White women, they say, have "hooks" (connections). [12.19]
- Black women report verbal racial insults. [12.20]
- Black women say they have more trouble with racial discrimination from the cops than from the public. [12.21]
- Black women claim that White women can get transferred inside to a warm job such as the switchboard on a cold night while they have to remain on the street. [12.22]

The reality, however, is that hiring minority officers often has very little impact on the issues that they are supposed to ameliorate. These issues include building instant rapport with the community and restoring or improving police/community relations, reducing institutional racial bias and racism, and other factors that are directly or indirectly related to changing the police subculture. Recall that the police subculture is characterized by various biases and stereotypes, cynicism, and an unwillingness to report other officers for misconduct.

[12.23]

The hiring of minority officers has seemingly neither significantly reduced engrained institutional racism in police departments nor reduced community tensions. Minority officers typically do not share the same view as the community but instead give their loyalty to the department. Black community perceptions of Black and White officers, for example, is sometimes contrary to principled beliefs that Black communities are more receptive and prefer Black officers.

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[12.25] A study published in the *Journal of Criminal Justice* by sociologist Ronald Weitzer who conducted 169 interviews with residents in three neighborhoods in Washington, DC, found that Black residents' interactions with White officers were less confrontational than expected by conventional wisdom.⁶ The study found White officers to generally be more lenient than Black officers, by being more cognizant of accusations of being unfair and harassing in nature. In contrast, Black officers were perceived by Black residents as treating them more harshly, with one interviewee stating "[Black officers] seem to look down on their people. They kick them around..." Adding, "It's amazing but White officers are far more courteous to Black people than Black officers are." Others explained the harsher behavior as a way to prove their loyalty to their White colleagues, and worthiness of being police officers, which highlights the strength of the police identity and loyalty to fellow officers.

[12.26] Moreover, the community often perceives these officers as "sell-outs" or betrayers of the community for joining an oppressive force. These minority officers frequently face hostility by the community who fail to understand why they are not given leniency by the officer. Many Hispanic and Asian officers only speak English. When one considers all these structural and cultural factors, it becomes clear why hiring minority officers has such little impact on changing the police culture and public perceptions of police. One 2007 study by Megan O'Neill and Simon Holdaway interviewed Black British police officers who expressed the inner-turmoil many racial minorities face in wanting to join the police force given these factors.⁷ One officer stated:

[12.27] So you know, the decision to become a police officer for a black person is not necessarily a quick, easy decision as it might be for a white officer... I had to look at where I came from, why I wanted to do it for the first instance and again saw the negativity. Because there is negativity out there about public services, police in particular. You know, so it was a big decision to make...

[12.28] The police force has gone out there and said 'Right, target the young Asians to go and join the force', I've said 'It ain't gonna be that easy,' because 99 percent of those Asian youngsters will be dictated to by their parents. And if their elders don't want them to join, you ain't gonna get them to join. You need to be sort of talking to the elders and convincing them that there is a career to be made out of joining the police force and whatever else before they'll start encouraging their offspring. Because as far as Asian society is concerned, their views are you go into jobs such as accountancy, doctorates, lawyer, teachers and also the preconceived idea that anyone who's come from India has always regarded the police force over in India as being totally corrupt.

[12.29] There is evidence, however, that shows qualitative differences between how Black and White officers handle conflict. A 2004 study showed that while





Black officers were more likely than White officers to engage in activities during conflicts that were more supportive in predominantly Black neighborhoods, they were also found to be more coercive than White officers.⁸

Some scholars have argued that recruiting more ethnic minorities simply gives the illusion of progress but does little to change the organization. Police researcher Ellis Cashmore interviewed police officers in England and Wales of African Caribbean and South Asian backgrounds on their perspectives on efforts to enhance cultural diversity.⁹ Some ethnic minority officers interviewed expressed cynicism towards “harmful” diversification efforts, calling them “window dressing,” for only giving the outward image of action while not actually resulting in any changes to address institutional racism. These minority officers were very critical of both ethnic-based recruitment and diversity training. Moreover, the officers downplayed their token identity as “Black police officers” and stressed their main identity as regular “police officers.”

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Researchers Megan O’Neill and Simon Holdaway, in a follow-up study, looked at the perspectives from interviews with more senior and higher ranking Black Police Association members and found racial minority officers can make an impact on departmental policy and procedures and can serve as an impetus for cultural changes. These officers interviewed perceived their identities as “Black police officers,” and not “police officers who happen to be Black.” Reaching a critical population threshold of minority officers, it is argued, allows for race and being an officer to be non-mutually exclusive categories. Minority officers can acknowledge police injustices and bias without feeling disloyalty to the department. Despite these positive perspectives from high ranking Black officers, overall change has been difficult and slow in many departments.

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There are several reasons why minority officers have had relatively little impact on changing the police culture and restoring community trust. The reasons include:

[12.32]

1. People attracted to policing and apply to policing jobs are specific types of persons. Regardless of race, sex, or even sexual orientation, recruits typically cite job security, career opportunity, family tradition of law enforcement, salary and benefits, a sense of adventure, and civic duty for joining the police force. Many individuals who do not share these values do not consider police work as a career.
2. The hiring process filters out individuals who do not fit the prototypical police mold. For those of you who are in policing or know of people who have applied to be in law enforcement, you know that the hiring process is quite extensive. Recruits not only must pass written and physical exams, but are subject to psychological screening and lengthy background checks. In addition, applicants are interviewed by

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multiple law enforcement personnel, whose primary goal is to make sure the applicant is “fit” to be a recruit. In policing, this means being able to trust that person. Recruits may be rejected if they do not quite fit in to the value system that the officers in the department hold or if they are viewed as incapable of performing police duties. This process often filters out candidates who may have particular skill sets but fail to fit in with the system, resulting in a very homogenous group of individuals who are eventually hired.

- [12.35] 3. Academy and field training further homogenizes the group by filtering out individuals who do not share core values. Successful academy cadets generally share the same viewpoint and belief about what is important in policework, physical training, self-defense, and marksmanship, considered “real” police work, while dismissing most lessons and activities not directly related to crime control. Individuals, for example, who may be excellent writers but do not see physical training as being of top importance, may find themselves eliminated. Stress training, where cadets are under constant scrutiny and an onslaught of verbal commands to put it gently, deemphasizes individuality for group identity.

[12.36] Rookie officers are further scrutinized by Field Training Officers who evaluate the performance, as well as “fit,” of the individual. Furthermore, recruits must be receptive to **cultural transmission** in the form of **storytelling** by veteran officers. These ‘war stories’ emphasize the dangers of the job while transmitting core values that new officers must internalize in order to be accepted into the group.

[12.37] The culmination of the three processes during application and training results in a homogenous group that thinks and acts alike, regardless of the race of the officer. In other words, the blue brotherhood usually trumps ethnic identity.

[12.38] LOYALTIES AND IDENTITY

[12.39] Regardless of gender, race, sexuality, and other categories of identity, officers are expected to have a high degree of loyalty to fellow officers. Unlike the days of the night watchmen where officers relied on the community for direct assistance during emergency situations, today’s officers are limited to fellow officers for help. These officer-needs-assistance calls are the most prioritized calls. Working under the constant threat of danger draws officers together and reinforces the ‘blue brotherhood,’ as characterized by the police subculture. This means loyalty to officers over loyalty to ethnic groups and other communities an officer may come from.





This expectancy of loyalty can put minority officers in a predicament. Minority officers are hired in part by the department, in theory, to change the organizational culture. Instead, these officers are usually incorporated into the culture but must patrol areas that expect them to be sensitive to their needs. For example, Black officers patrolling the inner-city minority neighborhoods are likely to encounter Black citizens who may expect a level of leniency. When such leniency is denied, they face hostility to a degree greater than what White officers would get, if they would get any at all. The same situation can be said about other racial minorities, including Hispanic and Asian officers.

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Despite their loyalties to the police, minority officers often face an identity conflict. Recall our discussion of the police culture in which many police organizations, such as the LAPD during the 1980s and 1990s, have been shown to tolerate openly racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes among some officers. This is problematic when there are racial minority, women, and gay/lesbian officers amongst their ranks. This puts many women and minority officers at odds with their fellow officers: Do they tolerate biases, or risk being alienated and ostracized by fellow officers that they must rely on during emergency situations? This quandary is faced by the small known numbers of officers who are gay and lesbian.

[12.41]

GAY AND LESBIAN COPS

[12.42]

While researchers, police management, and the public have focused mainly on women and racial minority officers as a point of progress in the world of policing, another sub-population of officers is often overlooked. Officers from the LGBTQ community face a unique set of challenges that have recently garnered the attention of departments and researchers.

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Historically, attitudes towards gay and lesbian officers have reflected community sentiments. For one thing, gay and lesbian officers exist. The public generally does not associate gay men, for instance, as fitting with the hyper-masculine and conservative working world of the police officer. Stereotypes of gay men as being weak and feminine, coupled with the fear of negative attitudes and ostracization by fellow officers has traditionally meant that gay and lesbian police officers have hidden their sexual identities. This hidden identity is not without reason. Like most victims of anti-gay and lesbian hate crimes who often do not report their victimization to police, lesbian and gay officers share similar fears of hostility, discrimination, and abuse.

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For members of the public who are lesbian or gay, studies have shown occupational negative ramifications of coming out, or revealing their sexual orientation. For instance, self-reporting studies found openly gay or lesbian

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officers faced reduced salaries and more difficulties getting hired. For lesbian and gay officers, their fear of coming out can be attributed historically to the consequences of many that have revealed their sexuality, which ranges from simply being subject to lewd comments and being shunned by other officers to potentially life-threatening ramifications, such as calls for backup being ignored.

[12.46] While there is little research in the area and even less public attention paid to this group, there are a small but significant number of homosexual officers nationwide. There is no estimate of how many are gay or lesbian since no official statistics exist, like they do with women and minority officers. Moreover, many of these officers have not disclosed their sexual orientation to fellow officers. However, there are some reports that show the presence of gay officers as well as their struggles of being gay.

[12.47] Former Hollywood, Florida, police officer Mike Verdugo, for example, was fired in 2010 for not disclosing he was in a gay bondage film he had made in 1996. Verdugo, who served for ten years, argued that the city fired him solely on the film and did not take action for not disclosing working other jobs in the past.

[12.48] In 2007, openly gay NYPD Police Officer Michael Harrington sued the department for discrimination and harassment. Harrington claims he was called “faggot” on numerous occasions by fellow officers who snubbed him at a Christmas party. He also claimed he was constantly bombarded with sexual innuendos about how he treats suspects. Finally, he was transferred from his patrol division to the West Village, a known gay neighborhood, to “be with his people.”

[12.49] Homosexual officers, the research shows, joined the police force for the exact same reasons given by straight officers. Researcher Roddrick Colvin found the following reasons for gay officers joining the police force:¹⁰

- [12.50]** • Job security 41%
- [12.51]** • Career opportunity 41%
- [12.52]** • Family tradition 17%
- [12.53]** • Salary/benefits 38%
- [12.54]** • Adventure 33%
- [12.55]** • Civic duty 41%

[12.56] THE GAY AND LESBIAN OFFICER EXPERIENCE

[12.57] Due to the strong police subculture, most homosexual officers hide their sexual identities in fear of discrimination and loss of trust by other officers. Remember, this trust is paramount since officers solely rely on each other for backup during life and death situations as part of the nature of the profession.



The small number of officers who choose to share their sexual orientation often do so when they are feeling truly secure in the force.

Revealing one’s homosexual identity can create a very hostile work environment, create social isolation, and subject one to intense harassment and homophobic talk.¹¹ Colvin’s survey of gay and lesbian officers found widespread differential treatment.¹²

[12.58]

- Outsider 51%
- Tokenism 43%
- Social isolation 48%
- Homophobic talk 67%
- Repeated harassment 34%
- Retaliation 25%

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[12.64]

Facing these consequences, many gay and lesbian officers do not share their sexual orientation. However, keeping one’s identity secret creates inner friction between one’s identity as a police officer and being a homosexual.

[12.65]

Concealment of a homosexual officer’s sexual orientation can manifest in negative ramifications for the individual as well as the department. First, the individual may suffer psychologically with feelings of denial, self-homophobia, negative identity development, and feelings of being a fraud. Second, suppression of sexual identity inhibits organizational change and implicitly reinforces the openly homophobic environment.

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Despite widespread social changes in attitudes of acceptance towards homosexuality in society, policing remains a slow-moving institution steeped in tradition and conservative values. Police departments were slow to incorporate women officers, who today still face similar issues, albeit less severe compared with homosexual officers. These women still work in a masculine profession that continually devalues their contributions and creates a losing predicament: Live up to the prescribed male standards of performance that require women to exhibit masculine behavior to ‘fit in’ but in doing so face the proverbial, “she’s a good officer, she must be lesbian,” attitude that diminish that performance.

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Lesbian and gay officers may keep their sexual identities secret based on perceptions that being openly homosexual may limit their opportunities. A survey of the professional support organization for lesbian and gay officers in New York, the Law Enforcement Gays and Lesbians International (LEGAL), found respondents cited possible promotion limitations (twenty-two percent) and bad assignments (seventeen percent) as barriers to equal opportunity for homosexuals. Moreover, many respondents experienced homophobic talk (sixty-seven percent), being cast as an outsider (fifty-one percent), social isolation (forty-eight percent), repeated harassment (thirty-four percent), and retaliation (twenty-five percent) treatment at work.

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[12.69] FROM NEW YORK'S STONEWALL RIOTS TO FORT WORTH'S RAINBOW LOUNGE RAID

[12.70] Two historic police-led events contextualize the gay rights and policing that happened forty years apart. The first event occurred in 1969 at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan, in New York City. The Stonewall Inn was a bar that openly catered to the LGBTQ community. It was one of the few establishments serving the LGBTQ community in a very strong homophobic social and political environment. However, the gay rights movement was gaining momentum from social turmoil and an atmosphere of change from the civil rights movement and protests from a counter-cultural movement of the Vietnam War and government corruption.

[12.71] Amidst growing tensions between police and the LGBTQ community, it was common for gay establishments, particularly bars, to be targeted for raids. On the early morning of June 28, 1969 police, including undercover agents, raided the Stonewall Inn to arrest patrons for violating public morality and alcohol restrictions. However, as over 200 bar patrons were led outside for arrest, many began resisting the rough treatment by police. This mistreatment by police sparked a large crowd of hundreds of neighborhood residents, many of whom were LGBTQ, to gather and lend support to the arrested bar patrons. Soon, the crowd began fighting back, which led to consecutive days of riots, sparking a pivotal milestone in the gay rights movement.

[12.72] Emboldened by the Greenwich LGBTQ community that came to the aid of bar patrons, national protests against police raids targeting the LGBTQ community occurred in major cities. The Stonewall Riots shifted the gay rights movement from a hidden stance to one of gay pride and a willingness to fight back. However, despite growing public support for LGBTQ rights, legal changes did not ensue until decades later. This slow change is in stark contrast to two earlier movements that resulted in a societal sea of change: the civil rights movement in the 1960s that resulted in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, followed by the women's rights movement that peaked with the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Riding on the momentum of these previous movements, the gay rights movement, which was supposed to reach a tipping point in the 1980s, was set back by weaker public support and the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which sparked a renewed wave of homophobia and stigmatization of the LGBTQ community.

[12.73] On June 28, 2008, the exact 40th anniversary date of the Stonewall Riots, Fort Worth Police Department officers and Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) agents conducted an early morning raid of The Rainbow Lounge. The Rainbow Lounge, like the Stonewall Inn, was a bar that openly catered to the LGBTQ community. The targeting of the Texas bar on the anniversary of Stonewall Riots drew instant international attention, which





prompted internal use of force investigations by both law enforcement agencies, and lawsuits to the city.

The internal investigation resulted in some significant changes to the Fort Worth Police Department, thrusting the department located in one of the most conservative areas of the country to be a leading proponent of LGBTQ rights. Among other positive internal changes within the department, the department now recognizes and extends benefits to partners of gay and lesbian officers. The department also established the position of a LGBTQ liaison officer and actively recruits from the LGBTQ community.

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In 2015, openly gay Fort Worth Police Officer Chris Gorrie appeared in a television ad that aired in advance of the 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals hearing on Texas’ ban on gay marriage.¹³ Other Fort Worth officers were also featured in the thirty-second ad in support of Officer Gorrie. In that same year, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, that gay marriage is legal in all fifty states.¹⁴

[12.75]

SUMMARY

[12.76]

Being a police officer is attractive to many people who like policework—in many cases it is an exciting, benevolent, and rewarding career. However, for those who are minorities, women, and homosexual, the career comes with difficulties. Women and minorities are a highly sought after demographic by departments that bring diversity into an institution that has historically and recently been steeped in controversy. Unfortunately, the goal of changing the institution from within has largely been unsuccessful. Instead of women and minorities bringing different perspectives to the police force, the institution has instead filtered out and changed these women and minorities to fit the existing culture, resulting in little to no change. This is especially problematic when that subculture includes, among other biases, homophobia and racist and sexist attitudes.

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For gay and lesbian officers, fitting in is especially difficult. These officers often maintain dual and conflicting identities as an officer and a homosexual. For the small numbers who are openly gay, they risk workplace discrimination that at best affects their morale but at worst could mean they face dangerous situations without being fully confident that other officers will quickly assist.

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Despite these difficulties, progress is being made to hire and to incorporate more LGBTQ officers into policing. Significant policy and cultural changes have come about after the infamous raid on the Rainbow Lounge, in Fort Worth, Texas, which occurred forty years to the day of the Stonewall Inn Riots in New York City. Many department’s management and officers no longer stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ officers. Nevertheless,

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most LGBTQ officers are wary of the social consequences of being a homosexual officer in a hyper-masculine environment and remain closeted, so to speak.

NOTES

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