



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Lesbians in Blue: Social Relationship Effects on Police Performance and Managing Their Homosexuality at Work

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Dec 27, 2024 Accepted: Feb 5, 2025	Throughout history, police officers have been portrayed as heterosexual men with male-specific traits. However, this qualitative study explored the six lesbian police officers' experiences in a predominantly male profession steeped in masculine stereotypes richly describing how the participants thrived despite their sexual orientation. They discussed their work-related relationships with co-workers and clients as well as their strategies for managing their homosexuality. Participants revealed unequal treatment, gender witticism, and an established working relationship with co-workers; while experiencing positive working relationships, client confusion, and situation-based relations from clients. Their strategies include accepting the challenges at work, remaining optimistic and open-minded, going with the flow, and affirming their sexual orientation with pride. The findings show that the participants' homosexual orientation does not prevent them from fulfilling police functions and they perform just as well as any other straight police officer.
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INTRODUCTION

The field of law enforcement is an indisputably male-dominated profession (Duffin, 2021). Because masculinity has heavily influenced the profession, police work is almost exclusively associated with masculine performance (Yalley & Olutayo, 2020). Throughout history, the police have been characterized as straight males who possess male-specific attributes. Because police must use physical strength to apprehend criminals, masculinity and brawn are the most important qualities they should possess (Miller et al., 2003). Police are stereotyped as men who can physically fight crime and protect the public. The ideal policeman should have no effeminate traits.

Having said that, the inclusion of females in law enforcement has raised some eyebrows. In the 19th century, women were not fully integrated into police work, and their roles were mainly auxiliary (Rubio et al., 2021). They were called police matrons and were explicitly appointed to care for women and girls held in custody by law enforcement agencies (Higgins, 1951). They had no authority to make arrests (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, n.d.).

Due to social change and diversity demands, women have gradually been accepted as part of the police force. The enactment of anti-discriminatory laws paved the way for women to join the police service. According to Brodeur (2018), the 1964 Civil Rights Act ended discriminatory hiring practices that prevented women from being hired. The Yogyakarta Principles (2017) also urged states to eliminate sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination to ensure equal employment and advancement opportunities in all public service sectors, including police and military, and provide appropriate training and awareness programs to combat discriminatory attitudes. Soon after, women started taking positions otherwise reserved exclusively for men. Police officials recognized the contributions that women can bring to the organization. In this context, Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10) becomes particularly relevant. SDG 10, established by the United Nations, aims to

reduce inequality within and among countries by ensuring equal opportunities and diminishing social, economic, and political disparities (United Nations, 2015). Within law enforcement, this goal can be seen in efforts to address gender and sexual orientation discrimination, thus promoting a more inclusive work environment. The integration of women and sexual minorities into police forces directly aligns with SDG 10's emphasis on inclusive policies that empower marginalized groups and promote their full participation in society. By breaking down barriers and challenging discriminatory practices, law enforcement agencies contribute to broader societal equality and justice.

Having policewomen in the organization has improved the quality of the relationship between the police and the communities because women are more compassionate than men when interacting with victims of crime. Miller & Segal (2019) examined the effects of US police women's integration. They found that having policewomen increased the likelihood of a violent crime being reported and decreased the occurrence of intimate partner violence. Albeit tediously slow, the integration of women into law enforcement has seen the light of day, and it continues to gain momentum and support (National Centre for Women and Policing, n.d.). These advancements reflect the broader objectives of SDG 10 by demonstrating that inclusive practices not only benefit marginalized individuals but also enhance institutional effectiveness and community trust.

As difficult as it was for women to be integrated into the police force, it was even more difficult for lesbians. Like other sexual minorities, lesbian officers face stigma, harassment, and discrimination. Barlow & Barlow (2000) posited that lesbian officers are treated as outsiders by the white, heterosexual, male-dominated police culture. Their male and female colleagues exclude them for not conforming to conventional femininity. According to a Williams Institute report, there is over 40 percent of gender-based discrimination against Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders (LGBT) federal employees in law enforcement and corrections departments (Sears et al., 2009). Some recorded incidents are severe verbal, physical, and sexual harassment against law enforcement and corrections personnel. An updated report found 95 documented cases of discrimination against LGBT officers since 2000 (Sears et al., 2013).

Archbold (2012) cites several reasons why some police officers opposed hiring lesbians. One is that the public would lose respect for the police. Another is that lesbian police officers would lower the morale within the department. The presence of sexual minority officers (to which lesbian police officers belong) was threatening to the traditional, masculine police culture because they challenged 'the hegemonic heterosexual masculinity' established by the dominant culture of police officers (Myers et al., 2004; Lyons et al., 2008, as cited by Papazoglou, 2019).

Despite these challenges and reported marginalization, the number of lesbian police officers is not diminished but increasing, and entirely so in the Philippines. There are only a few published studies regarding the struggles of policewomen in the Philippine setting such as the study of De Guzman & Frank (2004) who posited that Philippine policewomen struggled with society's perceptions towards women's stereotypical roles underestimating their physical capabilities which favored hiring more men than women. However, there are none about lesbian police officers, which brings attention to the need for research on the unique experiences of this marginalized group.

Instead of highlighting lesbian police officers' negative experiences, this research explored their strategies for being homosexuals in a male-dominated occupation. The researcher sought to understand how lesbian police officers thrive as law enforcement officers despite their homosexuality and how they maintain their "good cop" image despite public presumptions about norm violations related to their sexual orientation by studying their first-hand accounts. This study focused on the effects of social relationships with co-workers and clients on lesbian police officers' job performance and their strategies for managing their homosexuality at work.

In general, this study sought to gather new and valuable data on lesbian police officers to fill knowledge gaps and serve as a foundation for creating and amending relevant departmental policies and programs that may be used by organizations particularly the Philippine National Police (PNP) in promoting an inclusive and gender sensitive workplace. As lesbian police officers navigate their roles in a predominantly male profession, understanding the social relationship dynamics with their colleagues and clients becomes crucial for their job performance and well-being. By examining the strategies employed by lesbian officers to manage their sexual orientation at work, this study sheds light on the resilience and determination of these individuals in overcoming societal barriers and

stereotypes. Through a lens of SDG 10, which emphasizes the importance of fostering inclusive and supportive environments for all individuals, this research contributes to the broader conversation on diversity, equality, and social cohesion within the law enforcement sector. The results of this study may also be used in the academic field as additional material for discussions, particularly on gender and development. Quite possibly, some of the best practices of lesbian police officers in handling difficult situation related to their gender may serve as a guide to lesbian Criminology students aspiring to be police officers someday.

Lesbian police officers' workplace experiences managing their homosexuality are scarce, hence the researcher is interested in studying them. Also, lesbian police officers' dynamics and decision to embrace their homosexuality to prove their sworn duty are fascinating. With this in mind, the researcher has come up with the following research objectives:

1. Lesbian police officers' social relationships in their workplace
 - a) With their co-workers;
 - b) With the clients/ community they serve.
2. Strategies are used by lesbian police officers to manage their sexual orientation in the workplace

DESIGN AND METHOD

Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the need to gather in-depth insights from individuals with direct experience, an intensive ethical review which was conducted by the members of the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) of Mountain Province State Polytechnic College (MPSPC) during the proposal of this research. After complying the recommendations of the said committee, the conduct of this study had been approved to be conducted.

This study used the qualitative design employing the phenomenological approach (Stumpfegger, 2015) to understand better lesbian police officers' experiences and strategies to manage their homosexuality at work. The research was done at Bontoc, Mountain Province, Philippines where the participants are currently residing and are readily available for interviews.

Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to guide participant selection. Individuals eligible for inclusion in the study were required to self-identify as gay or homosexual, be currently employed in the Philippine National Police (PNP), and demonstrate a willingness to openly discuss and share their experiences related to sexual orientation in the workplace. Moreover, participants needed to be 35 to 45 years of age and have at least 5 years length of service in their respective uniformed service, ensuring a level of experience and insight relevant to the research focus. Conversely, individuals who did not identify as gay, were former police officers or retired police personnel, expressed unwillingness to discuss personal experiences related to sexual orientation at work, were under 18 years of age, or had not met the minimum required length of service were excluded from participation in the study.

Snowball sampling was used to contact one self-identifying lesbian police officer who qualified for the study. Another lesbian police officer was recommended for the interview. Only six lesbian police officers in Bontoc met the requirements after repeated referrals.

A known lesbian police officer helped the researcher collect data. The researcher informed the participant about the study and asked if she could participate to discuss her workplace experiences. After verbal consent, the researcher gave a copy of the written consent form to the participant. Having understood the contents of the informed consent form, the participant filled out, signed, and gave back the form to the researcher. To ensure the anonymity of the participant, 'Red' was designated as the participant's pseudonym. The individual interview followed using the approved guide. At the end of the interview, the researcher asked Red for other Bontoc lesbian police officers who may serve outside Bontoc. Red referred two lesbian police officers from Bontoc.

The researcher did the same process with the succeeding five participants of this study. The researcher verified consent before each interview and assured the participants that their information would be kept confidential and used only for research. Also, pseudonyms were used to safeguard the identity of the subjects. Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Indigo, and Violet were used to depict the LGBT

pride flag, also known as the rainbow flag. Because most interviews were over the phone, follow-up interviews were conducted via video conferencing to verify and clarify the material.

In treating the data, all findings and results were presented in facts stated during the interviews. The researcher personally transcribed the statements of the participants. All participants' experiences and perceptions were expressed during the interviews. No false information was included in the final manuscript. The researcher used the inductive coding method as the codes were taken directly from the qualitative data, and the values coding method to find common responses about their beliefs, views, and attitudes towards their experiences in their workplace. These common responses were re-coded and grouped to reveal the underlying trends following the thematic analysis protocol of Braun & Clarke (2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Six self-identified lesbian police officers with masculine traits were interviewed for this study. The subjects' common responses regarding their lived experiences as police officers are listed below, focusing on these aspects: 1) social relationships with co-workers and clients; and 2) strategies for managing their homosexuality at work.

ON SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH CO-WORKERS AND CLIENTS

A. Social Relationship with Co-workers

Unequal treatment from Co-workers. The unequal treatment of lesbian police officers dismantles the effectiveness of their behavior and attitude towards work, innately harming their well-being. The study before us shows that participants, in one way or another, experienced unequal treatment from their co-workers.

The participants experienced the feeling of being discriminated against due to their gender orientation. For instance, Participant Red received snubs from her co-worker female police officers because of her odd difference from them.

Similarly, Participant Violet recounted one instance of discrimination from a few male co-workers. Being the only lesbian in their Unit (PNP et al.), Participant Violet said that, *'When I was assigned in this unit, I usually greet my Senior Police Non-Commissioned Officers during the start of shift but they do not react at all as if they have not seen or heard me. But when another officer comes in and greets them, my Senior officers greet the him back.'*

Participant Indigo also experienced unequal treatment from a male colleague in her previous work assignment: *"One time, I argued with a co-worker because he said, 'Whatever you say and do, you are still a woman and this is a man's job!' Why can't we just respect each other."*

Such experiences show that some still regard policing as a male-dominated profession and resent non-males. Couto (2015) found that police culture is 'primarily conservative, outwardly masculine, and 'an old boys' network. Many police services have gender-specific rules, reflecting Western views of gender as binary - male or female only (Ibid.).

The rights against discrimination were enunciated under the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states that *'All human beings are born free and with equal dignity and rights.'* Despite significant legislative changes regarding protection from discrimination due to sexual orientation, its practical application has been limited (Radicioni & Weicht, 2017). It is also clear that the right to be respected is lacking because the gender identity of lesbian officers is not well recognized. It highlights the need for ongoing efforts to create a supportive environment for all officers, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. This approach not only benefits individual officers but also enhances the overall effectiveness and equity of law enforcement agencies. As the field continues to evolve, promoting diversity and inclusion will remain crucial in achieving the broader goals of social justice and equality envisioned by SDG 10.

Participant Orange's narrative exposed discriminatory treatment against lesbian police. Her romance with another female police officer offended several of her co-workers; one even told her and her lover that they were breaking God's rule. Ho & Hu (2016) suggest that the same identity conflicts between Christianity and non-heterosexuality in real life, where pre-existing standards and institutionalized cultural beliefs make intimate relationships with sexual minorities unworthy of respect.

Nonetheless, Participant Orange and her female police lover ignored their co-worker's negative comments because they knew same-sex relationships are still prohibited in conservative catholic nations like the Philippines. According to the 2014 USAID research, *'Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report,'* 'religion plays a crucial role in Filipinos' lives with the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church.' The church opposes anti-discrimination measures and occasionally strives to influence public policy negatively, which can lead to prejudice (UNDP-USAID, 2014).

Gender Witticism. Witticism is popular in the Philippines. Filipinos enjoy laughing. Humor compromises language, morality, rationality, and even faith (Rillo & Buslon, 2019). Gender witticism is a social prejudice that often enters the workplace. Social inequities appear in gender-skewed professions. The police perpetuate society's gender biases (Patil & Bagavandas, 2020). Participant Yellow avoids female coworkers because they tease her. She mentions that

"There are no issues with my colleagues except for the three female senior officers. They tease me all the time saying that if only I would let men court me and have my own man, I might cling to him and might forget that I was once a lesbian because having intercourse with the opposite sex provides pleasure."

Participant Orange and Participant Green also experienced their gender orientation being made fun of during their training days. Participant Orange recalled that, *"My gender identification was not an issue throughout the deployment. However, when we were at the training school, other tomboy trainees and I were instructed to wear heels and make-up for fun."*

Similarly, Participant Green described her training days, *"This should be off the record, but we had the worst experience during our training. We wore dresses and heels to our AIs' delight. There were six of us tomboys, and we said, 'Bring it on!' We gained their respect by never whining and displaying our competence."*

Furthermore, most participants' gender witticism involves being teased by male co-workers over their skirt uniforms. Participant Yellow said,

"When I got my first promotion, it was mandatory to wear the skirt uniform. There were male officers noticing me entering the ground and I immediately became the subject of their heckling. One of them said I looked pretty wearing the skirt and if I use it daily, he might want to court me. The other officers were laughing knowing it was a joke."

The social and professional relationships of sexual minority officers have improved in recent years, however, overt and subtle discrimination against non-heteronormative identities are still observed (Di Marco et al., 2021). This is particularly true based on the participants' workplace experiences which demonstrate that police culture is still wary of the presence of lesbians in the service on account of their gender identity and sexual orientation. These experiences affirm the Cultural Approach to Organizations Theory of Schein (2010) suggesting that lesbian police officers continue to struggle in their workplace because the police culture fundamentally retains a hypermasculine and heterosexual orientation.

Established Working Relationship. Despite the homophobic talk encountered at the workplace, all participants were able to build positive working relationships with their colleagues. The interviews suggest that humor, work ethic, and respect are three significant factors that help create good relationships with their co-workers.

Two participants said that when first stationed in their respective offices, they tried to stay calm and ignore the sarcasm, teases, and gender witticism. *'Due to the non-stop teasing, I stopped going out with them. I paid attention to my work and got things done on time. I am not sure, but maybe the results of whatever job my superiors gave me were good enough that my work relationship with them slowly got better and the teasing stopped after,'* said Participant Yellow.

Participant Orange did the same when she and her girlfriend were pestered by a co-worker; they tried to ignore the negative comments and concentrated on doing the job right. These sharing imply restraining explicit emotional responses to prevent conflict. Rather than fighting with other colleagues, the participant and her partner followed their supervisors' orders and thus establishing a positive professional relationship with them.

De Castella et al. (2018) found that participants described affective and cognitive avoidance in response to discrimination. Cooper et al. (1992) observed that balanced individuals fully engage in personal and career goals. They do not let situational urgencies affect role performance. Instead, they develop routines to meet the long-term demands of all roles, avoiding co-worker conflict.

According to Participant Green,

"Today, I believe that my colleagues and I have a harmonious working relationship and even with the community. Good interaction was slowly built through a positive attitude like the manner and tone of talking to our superiors. When it comes to the tasks given, we do not complain. Instead, we comply immediately. In the PNP organization, the mantra is Comply before complaint. Eventually, we gained their respect, and we treated each other as brothers and sisters then".

Participant Green emphasized that communication, hard work, and obedience are critical to a harmonious workplace. According to Rosales (2015), positive interactions improve employees' awareness of others, hence respecting each other. The findings suggest that a positive work ethic in their working environment eventually gained her co-workers' respect.

Among the participants, Participant Violet had fewer encounters with unequal treatment:

"I get along with my female co-workers. They accepted the fact that I am a lesbian. Since most of us are from outside Metro Manila, we live in the same barracks and spend more time together than with our families, so we treat each other like siblings. They do not hesitate to ask me for help at work, which pushes me to improve further because I am happy working and getting along with everyone makes the job easier and faster."

This implies that good working relationships boost employee productivity. Zhenjing, et al. (2022) corroborate this study by affirming that a positive work environment increases employee performance, commitment, and achievement-striving. A task-based approach to recruiting, grooming, and retaining a loyal team works well in a workplace that prioritizes people (Quest Adventure Camp Organization, 2019).

The results of this study also highlight that despite subtle discrimination and unequal treatment in the workplace, lesbian police officers gained the acceptance and trust of both their colleagues and the community they served through hard work and professional interaction. The participants' conscious efforts to perform their best in the line of duty complying diligently with the tasks assigned to them and working twice as hard as heterosexuals proved that their homosexual orientation does not impede their police performance. The results validate Myers, et al., (2004) conclusion stating that lesbian officers are likely to work harder to prove themselves as worthy crime fighters.

B. Social Relationship to Community

Positive Social Relationship. Most participants noted the community's positive social relationships. Participants generally agreed that their community had a good working environment if cooperation and personal engagement were observed. Participant Red stated,

"There is a good working relationship built because of the different Police Community Relations (PCR) activities done within the Area of Responsibility. PCR activities require community interaction, which I gladly participated in. It builds trust between me and the community and the police station."

As for Participant Yellow, she mentioned that, *'Dealing with clients, the approach and tone of voice matter. I always remind myself to observe professionalism regardless of who I am talking to and that really helped me to have a positive working relation with diverse clients.'* The sharing indicates that commitment to service and maintaining professionalism improves work. This, in turn, leads to a positive outlook of police officers in general from the community.

Likewise, Participant Green said, *"If you are a cop, you talk to people so they do not fear you. My neighbor once said, 'Oh, so you are a lady. Nice skirt.' 'Did I get more handsome?' Then we laughed. This avoids misunderstandings and builds community relations."*

These disclosures show that lesbian police officers are trying to fit in with the community members to foster a positive police-community relationship. Additionally, Participant Indigo said, *'For me,*

being of the third sex helps since I can relate to anyone, whether a straight male or a straight female, making it easier to work with an array of clients. This emphasizes that lesbian police officers' ability to be flexible with their gender roles makes them understand how a male and a female think altogether. This affirms the findings of Harper et al. (2012) on gender flexibility as a positive aspect of being gay or lesbian. Participants discussed their ability to display masculine and feminine traits, which helped them understand their environment. This also supports Archbold (2012) claim that lesbian police improve police-community relations because they are less judgmental.

Situation-based Relations. Nonetheless, the participants presume that not everyone appreciates them as mentioned by Participant Indigo:

"As a police officer, community interaction is a must. There are clients who will look at me and say, 'Hey tomboy, just stay in the office, let the men do the job!' I stay calm and remind myself that it's part of the job to hear nasty comments. But not all are bad because there are also those community members who will admit their mistakes and apologize when I give traffic tickets."

Participant Orange has the same sentiment, *'Concerning social relationships with clients, and the community; it would depend on the situation and the person I deal with. Not everyone will like me as a police officer which is fine by me.'*

The police protect communities from violence, making it one of the most stressful jobs (Alexopoulos, et al. 2014). Lesbian officers face additional stress of being a sexual minority; hence, when the community does not cooperate or appreciate their efforts, they try to console themselves by remembering why they joined the police force which is to serve and protect.

Client Confusion. Community members are still confused about the proper way to address lesbian officers. As stated by Participant Red:

"Some clients do not know how to address me. I am called 'Ma'am,' 'Sir,' or 'Oh, sorry, Sir, I mean Ma'am' sometimes. I ignore them to avoid discomfort, but I wish there were gender-neutral language topics to be taught in schools and some seminars and trainings for employees in different agencies to avoid scenarios like this."

It can be inferred from this sharing that confusion on how to address lesbian police officers puts clients and lesbian officers in an awkward situation. The client's use of 'sir' or 'ma'am' may seem respectful, but the lesbian police officer may feel uncomfortable. The scenario is an example of unconscious bias. Smith (2018) claims that unconscious bias does not intend to offend. However, years of stimuli have programmed human brains to categorize others as 'male' or 'female'.

Another instance of the client needing clarification is concerning the use of comfort rooms. Participant Violet shared that,

"Women are usually surprised to see me in the female washroom because they thought I was a male officer. These comments make me smile because I am seen as a man, but sometimes I feel awkward seeing the discomfort from other women while I am in the female's washroom. If only the SOGIE Bill will be passed into law to address issues like this."

The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression Equality (SOGIE) bill, which intended to legitimize anti-discrimination, was first introduced to the Philippine political body. The discussion on the passing of SOGIE bill has reached twenty years with no end in sight. Indeed, majority of legislators and members of the civil society passionately talk against the LGBTs very existence (Masilungan & Golfo-Barcelona, 2020).

Participant Orange also shared some 'client discomfort' experiences in which she faced gender inequality in handling client complaints. Due to her sexual orientation, some clients are uncomfortable answering the officer's queries especially sex-related issues, hence Participant Orange seeks assistance from another policewoman to handle these situations. Westmarland (2017) stated that the 'appropriate' gender must interview victims and examine personal physical injuries in sexual assault cases to uphold the police's decency and dignity. This workaround indicates the need for enhanced organizational training and awareness programs on inclusive client engagement to foster a more gender-sensitive environment, ensuring that all employees can perform their duties without discrimination and that clients' concerns are addressed equitably.

On Strategies Utilized By Lesbian Police Officers To Manage Their Sexual Orientation In The Workplace

Say It Loud, Lesbian, and Proud. Participants were in unison that there is no shame in being a lesbian and that they were confident in their sexuality even before they joined the police. Being open about their sexual orientation improves their life. This supports Galvin-White and O'Neal's (2016) study on Southwestern lesbian police officers. In this study, disclosing their sexuality helped them build trust with co-workers and improve their collaboration.

Participant Yellow said, *'I know who I am and I will confidently say it out loud and proud that I am lesbian police officer who is ready to serve and protect.'* These point to two things. First is accepting their true identity, and second is not letting anyone oppress them because of their sexuality. The police protect the community and protecting others requires self-protection.

Go with The Flow. Participants disclosed that they experienced gender-related issues, but they learned to adapt and cope with any given situation. Participant Red said, *'In this profession, I deal with people from different backgrounds having different beliefs. I learned to adapt and go with the flow to avoid conflicts and accomplish what is this job demands.'*

In the police profession, officers work with people with different personalities and background. These lesbian officers learned to be flexible so as to perform their functions without fighting with anyone. Adaptability is the ability to change to suit a situation or purpose, and this characteristic is correlated to being flexible. Police officers interact with the spectrum of humanity daily; hence, they should always be flexible (Emberlin, 2018).

Participant Green had the same strategy as she said,

"I cope by going with the flow. Some colleagues tease me for wearing a skirt during inspections. It is protocol and going against it could mean negative consequences for me. So, I tease them back with other issues to get even with them. Then we all laugh at our own jokes. Slowly, we began getting along."

This explains why lesbian officers are gradually gaining acceptance into the law enforcement organization affirming Allport's Contact Theory which proposes that under appropriate conditions, interpersonal contact could be one of the most effective ways to reduce issues of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination between majority and minority group members (Allport, 1954).

Challenges Accepted. It was revealed that lesbian officers performed well with a *'Bring it on'* attitude. Participant Red mentioned that due to the constant teasing from her co-workers about her sexual orientation, she avoided them and focused on her daily tasks instead. She viewed every task as a challenge to do it right thus avoiding co-worker criticism. This finding validates the study conducted by the National Centre for Women and Policing (n.d.) that gender minorities who committed minor errors in performance that would usually be ignored or handled by an immediate supervisor are written up as complaints and sent forward for investigation.

Participant Yellow stated,

"Other police officers and some community members see lesbians as persons who cannot do anything right in their lives. When I became part of the force, I proved these community members wrong. Whenever I accomplished every task on time, I proved these officers wrong."

Participant Orange shared the same sentiment, saying, *'The important thing is to never refuse the assignment given to me and to finish it before the deadline. This way I am proving that I am an asset to the police organization.'* This implies that Participant Orange represents someone with a strong work ethic because she ignores negativity and focuses on getting the job done quickly. They followed superior officers' orders without complaining, proving that being gay did not hamper their job performance.

Over time, participants earned their colleagues' respect. This affirms the gender capital theory, which states that women can access masculine capital by acting manly in a male-dominated profession (Huppertz & Goodwin, 2013). Participants revealed that they welcome challenges and try to fit in by adopting masculine traits and leadership styles.

The Art of Maximum Tolerance in Practice. According to Villania (2020), maximum tolerance is the highest degree of restraint that the military, police, and other peacekeeping authorities should observe, even if there are minor violations. Even if there is a legal basis for arrest, one should be tolerated as much as possible. Most participants said they learned to endure gender witticisms and unequal treatment at work to avoid conflict with co-workers and clients and keep work on track.

In one online interview, Red said,

"I just laugh at their jokes, but I also get pissed, so I leave before I say something bad, especially since they are my seniors." Orange also said, "There are those co-workers whose day is not complete unless they tease me and my girlfriend, but we do not listen. In this line of work, maximum tolerance needs to be applied both to clients and co-workers."

Participant Indigo gave her point of view on the practice of tolerance as she said, *"My shift begins at eight in the morning until eight in the evening; I get to hear many things, and I learned to disregard unpleasant comments and tried my hardest to get along with the people I work with and those in my neighborhood."*

These participants learned how to use patience to manage high-risk situations and avoid conflict with other police officers and the community they swore to protect. According to Emberlin (2018), the training they established at field training programs kept police officers grounded in reality through maximum tolerance, which often yields the best results.

Being optimistic and Open-minded. 'Accept the fact that not all you colleagues will like you and not all clients will accept who you are. The most important thing is to do your job properly.' This is the statement of Participant Orange in managing her homosexual orientation in her workplace. Being open-minded means having the ability to consider other perspectives of other people, even when you disagree with them. In the field of policing, this implies that to come into an agreement, one must understand where the other is coming from hence respecting each other's opinion.

The participants in this study believe that the recognition and acceptance they receive despite their sexual orientation motivate them to be better police officers than they can be. They also agreed that they felt treated better today. One participant noted that homosexuality-based workplace discrimination is less of a problem today. This confirms Couto's (2014) research that while police culture remains to be hetero-normative bias, most officers believe their status and relationships in their workplaces are more optimistic today compared to other eras (Ibid. 2014). Policing has evolved to include greater tolerance of sexual minority officers, including lesbian police officers.

CONCLUSIONS

The study indicates that lesbian police officers are more likely to be involved in dyadic interactions inside the workplace that include both positive and negative interactions. The participants' positive experiences which included favorable working relationships with certain clients have the potential to improve the effectiveness of their duties and promote a culture of trust within the community. This, in turn, can lead to increased public safety and decreased crime rates.

Also, lesbian police officers are susceptible to gender-based discrimination and unequal treatment in their workplace, leading to adverse effects on their job satisfaction and well-being. Although the participants developed methods to manage the difficulties they encounter, including maintaining positivity and embracing their sexual identity confidently, these findings emphasize the importance of the PNP organization addressing challenges through adoption of policy recommendations and training programs that promote diversity, inclusion, and tolerance. These suggested actions will foster an inclusive work environment that may improve the job performance and well-being of all officers, including those who identify as lesbians.

This study provides evidence that the sexual orientation of lesbian police officers does not hinder their abilities to effectively carry out their duties as police officers. The findings suggest that lesbian officers are equally capable of fulfilling their police functions as any other straight officer. Hence, sexual orientation should not be a factor in determining an individual's suitability for a career in law enforcement.

It is recommended that a collaboration of the Mountain Province Police Provincial Office-Women's Desk Section, Police Community Relations Section, and Mountain Province State Polytechnic College-Gender and Development Unit to adopt and implement the crafted policy brief, the Proposed Stigma Reduction Intervention Program, and the created Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials that were based from the results of this study to promote gender and equality awareness among police officers and other stakeholders.

Because this study only focused on the social relationships of lesbian police officers with their coworkers and clients, the results do not necessarily apply to the entire LGBT population who certainly have different experiences at work. Hence, this study is recommended to serve as a basis for further investigation and discussion on the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in law enforcement and the importance of creating inclusive and supportive work environments. Addressing these issues can improve the law enforcement effectiveness.

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