

***Gay and Lesbian Cops: Diversity and Effective Policing*, by Roddrick A. Colvin
(Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2012**

This book confronts an area of police organisation which has received scarce empirical research – the experiences of gay and lesbian officers. Colvin's study is a comparative one focusing on the UK and USA police, comprising of fieldwork in specific locales in both countries (Hampshire and Wiltshire in the UK, and Washington DC in the USA). This included a non-random survey of gay, lesbian and bisexual officers in the UK (n=243) and in the USA (n=66), together with qualitative interviews and focus groups with a smaller number of officers – totalling the largest single study of gay and lesbian officers conducted. Situated within the broad theme of community policing, Colvin charts the ways the diversity of the police organisation has evolved, and the political processes which have structured this. Colvin's analysis is focused principally around the roles of gay and lesbian police officers and their cultural competency to deal with crimes involving the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community (GLBT).

In the context of previous hallowing works charting systematic homophobia within the police (e.g. Burke, 1993, Leinen, 1993), the book reads very optimistically in many sections, charting the numerous strides taken to improve the experiences of gay and lesbian officers in the police. Much of the book is focused on the role of specific units established within the police organisation to respond to crimes impacting on the GLBT community. These police initiatives include Lesbian and Gay Liaison Officers (LAGLOs) evident in many police departments in England and Wales, and Gay and Lesbian Liaison Units in Washington D.C. These initiatives are analysed through the police's roles and effectiveness in both engaging with GLBT communities, and responding to homophobic-orientated crimes. In both situations, the police have historically failed to establish trust with such communities. Colvin describes the organisational changes which have given rise to a much more progressive police response in both the UK and US field sites. The changes within the Washington D.C Police Department were attributed to several high profile incidents of police corruption and systematic failures to respond to hate crimes involving the GLBT community, where the then chief of police, Charles Ramsey implemented an organisational 'shake-up' of the department to improve its relations with minority communities. By contrast in the UK, Colvin attributes the police's organisational changes to the McPherson Report and its provision of guidelines to improve relations between the police and minority communities. In the U.K field sites these were also supported by sexual health agencies whose evidence gathering helped uncover a reliable picture of needs and experiences of the GLBT community which was subsequently used by the police to help devise policies in these areas. As evidence of such progress made by the police, Colvin points to factors including higher rates of hate crime reporting, a greater level of trust between the police and GLBT community, and higher rates of crimes solved, particularly homicides.

The overall argument of the book is a mixed picture of the genuine recognition of sexual diversity within the police. The success appears to be more for GLBT communities than for the actual officers responding to such crimes. The survey responses included significant numbers of respondents reporting discrimination in terms of employment and promotion opportunities, feelings of isolation due to their sexual orientation, as well as instances of receiving homophobic slurs against them from other

officers. However, whilst these findings are woven into latter chapters in the book, analysis of these issues were minimal by comparison to documentations of the progress, and opportunities for further improvements to the sexual diversity of the police organisation. This was expressed both in relation to the volume of serving gay and lesbian officers, and the values driven through policies and procedures designed to investigate crime and victimisation involving GLBT communities. A particular strength of the book was the repeated attempt to connect the plight of gay and lesbian officers with other minorities within the police organisation (namely involving race, ethnicity and gender). Here many similarities are discovered in terms of discrimination, characterised by the general underrepresentation of these groups within the police. Colvin assesses the status of community policing as a mechanism through which to situate and enact specific responses to the GLBT community, highlighting some of the critiques of this model of policing, most notably the implementation gap between the intentions and the actual practices of community policing. What Colvin does not develop however is an analysis of whether the rather normative construct of 'community' displayed and enacted within community policing can embrace the multitude of minority identities and experiences both of and within GLBT groups, including the potential outcome of this 'community' model for excluding and marginalising particular voices and experiences (see also Moran, 2007).

Colvin also develops the analysis of the experiences of gay and lesbian officers into a number of useful policy recommendations, focusing on leadership, planned change, recruitment and retention of police officers. At the core of Colvin's argument is the belief that 'a diverse police force will enhance an agency's understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community' (p153). Firstly, change within the police must be driven by senior officers in a noncoercive manner, guiding and not driving through reforms as a way of re-aligning rank and file officers' beliefs and values. Secondly, planned change should be strategic and seek to establish a climate of change which accommodates diversity and inclusion. Thirdly, recruitment drives should apply 'population-specific strategies' (p.164) as a way of improving the pool of possible police recruits. Finally, retaining officers once they arrive should be developed through strategies including financial compensation and incentives, training and education, promotion streams, mentoring and officer associations to provide support for GLBT officers when in post.

Whilst supportive of the central contentions of the book regarding the changing diversity of the police through the experiences of gay and lesbian officers, there were certain features of the analysis which were less convincing. One reservation concerns the role of specific lesbian and gay policing units involved in delivering strategies of engagement and investigation of crime and victimisation within GLBT communities. As previously mentioned, such units are repeatedly referred to in the text as success stories in improving the diversity of the police and their responsiveness to crimes impacting on the GLBT community. Without doubting the benefits of such initiatives for the police and the community, this argument is difficult to make unless a comprehensive analysis of the attitudes and working practices of non-gay and lesbian officers is made. No doubt the units can play a key role in inspiring cultural change within the police, but given recent research highlighting the continuation of many dominant elements of police culture which have been well attributed to homophobic police officer behaviour (Loftus, 2008,

2010), the analysis would have profited from a closer connection with these bodies of literature. These include a resistance to 'outsiders' (non-white, male and heterosexual officers), strong officer solidarity, a masculine ethos encouraged by the perception of conflict and violence in policing, and shared conservative values systems both in the political form, but also in terms of resistance to many police reforms. Whilst organisational change in the police is undoubtedly complex, one such manifestation of the McPherson Report's attempt to improve police responses to diversity issues has been a growing sense of anxiety for its traditional officer demographic – namely white, working class male officers. This anxiety can often lead to resistance and even more attenuated homophobia (and racism and sexism) in certain situations, what Loftus (2008) argues is symptomatic of what she terms 'white victimhood'. In short, although the progress charted in the book of the police's engagement with diversity issues is significant, it remains to be seen whether the current austerity cuts to police budgets will genuinely accommodate such diversity, or rather lead to growing instances of cynicism and resistance at a rank and file officer level.

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