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(2015)

Policing LGBTIQ people in rural spaces: emerging issues and future concerns.

*Rural Society*, 24(3), pp. 227-243.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/10371656.2015.1099264>

# **POLICING LGBTIQ PEOPLE IN RURAL SPACES: EMERGING ISSUES AND FUTURE CONCERNS**

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## **KEYWORDS**

LGBT; police; rurality; remote; queer criminology; rural criminology

## **ABSTRACT**

This article argues identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and/or questioning (LGBTIQ) in rural spaces can produce specific types of policing experiences. While some literature examines the experiences of LGBTIQ people with police, very little has focused on how rurality explicitly shapes these experiences. This is significant considering research highlights how rurality can be connected to pronounced experiences of homophobia and transphobia. The article highlights examples from three research projects that explored: LGBTIQ young people's interactions with police; LGBTI peoples' interactions with police liaison services; and LGBTIQ-identifying police officers. The examples demonstrate the need for further research to examine how policing happens with rural LGBTIQ people to ensure more accountable policing policies and practice, and to highlight the complexities of localised, rural policing contexts that can both support and marginalise LGBTIQ people.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent times, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and/or questioning (LGBTIQ – this acronym is commonly used in research as a broader 'catch all' term that incorporates a range of other categories, such as genderqueer, pansexual, asexual, and questioning – Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith 2012) have been the focus of research relating to policing (Dwyer, 2011; Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011). This focus is timely given the growing sub-field of 'queer criminology' research on LGBTIQ experiences of criminal justice (Ball 2014; Panfil 2014; Woods 2014), and considering the historically victimising and violent police-LGBTIQ relationships especially in two forms. Some accounts show LGBTIQ people have been victimised by a member of the public and police do not respond, or indeed further victimise them (Dodge, 1993). Other accounts suggest police specifically target LGBTIQ people for violence and victimisation (Comstock, 1991). Even gay- and lesbian-identifying police officers report experiencing discrimination from other police (Colvin, 2012).

However, to date, the focus of research has been informed by an implicit assumption: that these issues are urban. Similar to the Anglo-centric (Crichlow, 2004) focus of queer criminology, the urban focus appears accidental rather than deliberate, for instance emerging out of the methodological difficulties presented by connecting with LGBTIQ people in rural areas, given they are hidden in these locations due to homophobia, "the fear or hatred of homosexual people" (Flood and Hamilton, 2008, p. 16) and transphobia, similar fear, hatred, and prejudices, but directed towards transgender people (Chakraborti & Garland 2009, p. 56-

57). Social science research, for instance, shows that LGBTIQ people in rural areas can experience similar discrimination in their everyday lives as urban LGBTIQ people, but being in rural spaces intensifies this (Gottschalk & Newton, 2009). Even so, it is clear the focus on LGBTIQ people and policing has come to be thought about largely as an urban issue.

This article argues we need to trouble this urban-centric focus in research on police-LGBTIQ relationships. It makes a case for thinking outside urban centres to elaborate the more complex relations that may emerge between LGBTIQ people and police in rural areas. The article first engages with three key bodies of literature, exploring: how policing happens in rural contexts broadly; specific experiences of LGBTIQ people in rural spaces; and how policing happens with LGBTIQ people in urban areas. This research highlights a need to focus within both queer criminology and rural criminology on how rurality shapes LGBTIQ-police relationships. The article then elaborates snippets of interview data from three urbanised studies of LGBTIQ-policing relationships that also indicate the need for a rural turn in research about policing LGBTIQ people. While the focus in these studies was urbanised policing experiences of LGBTIQ people, and only passing references were made about rural issues, these snippets of data nevertheless reinforce the need to shift research in this direction. The article concludes by making two interrelated calls on the basis of these discussions. It calls for a 'queer turn' within rural criminological research, at the same time as a 'rural turn' within queer criminological research (Hogg & Carrington, 2006; Carrington, Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014; Ball, 2014; Peterson & Panfil, 2014). Only such 'turns' can be effective in elaborating most fully the intersecting issues in the rural lives of LGBTIQ people and their experiences of policing.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Why focus on LGBTIQ and policing in rural contexts?**

As detailed below, there are three key bodies of literature highlighting the increasing importance of focusing on this area. First, research on rural policing shows issues specific only to a rural setting, including police racism emerging as a result of social diversification of rural spaces. Second, research with LGBTIQ people in rural contexts indicates how LGBTIQ people living in rural spaces may experience complex discriminations, something suggestive of the need for rural police to have specialised knowledge. Third, research examining LGBTIQ-police relationships suggests we need to investigate these issues further in rural settings.

#### *Policing in rural contexts*

Research around policing in rural contexts largely reflects concerns related to how to police effectively with few police and across expansive territories. For instance, research into public attitudes about police in rural areas has shown some community members are concerned about police capacity to respond to emergencies in smaller communities. In 2004, Mawby conducted a survey in rural England to measure the attitudes of residents towards police and crime within their community. Mawby (2004) found almost 80% of respondents felt there were not enough police and many felt police were inaccessible due to restricted police station opening hours and a lack of local substations. Ironically, people in rural areas can interpret this as a lack of policing and a lack of police availability, amounting to feeling unsafe and unsupported by police, even though research suggests they can have *closer* relationships with local police.

Despite the perceived inaccessibility of rural police, it is evident rural police can share closer personal relationships with the public than in urban settings. Police in rural areas have reported higher levels of job satisfaction since moving from the city, and many feel enjoyment interacting with local communities (Jobes, 2003). Jobes (2003) suggests effective rural policing relies heavily on community involvement and, as a result, community policing is more popular in rural contexts, especially given its focus on problem solving rather than law enforcement (Weisheit, Wells, & Falcone, 1994). Although beneficial in rural contexts, police having close ties with rural communities may lead to issues like role conflict, with officers feeling torn between their responsibility as a law enforcer and their responsibility as a

community member (Jobes, 2003). Further, because police are more visible in rural communities and citizens know police by name, community members may have higher expectations of police (Weisheit et al., 1994).

In addition to operational and attitudinal policing issues, the overall conservatism of rural environments can make policing difficult for people, particularly when acknowledging and respecting social diversity (Morant & Edwards, 2011). Racism, for instance, can occur more in rural areas because ethnic minority groups in rural locations are feared as people different from the community majority (Garland & Chakraborti, 2007). Police need to be aware of marginalisation of ethnic minority groups in rural environments and the importance of responding appropriately (Garland & Chakraborti, 2007), especially since Indigenous peoples in Western colonised nations can be subject to considerable discrimination from police in the first instance (Cunneen, 2001). Although complicated enough, adding LGBTIQ status hints at potential concerns when considering policing Indigenous people in rural contexts. Rural areas are known for being more homophobic than urban areas (Flood & Hamilton, 2008; Eldridge, Mack & Swank, 2006). Although research on police-LGBTIQ relationships in rural contexts is yet to be done, general research about LGBTIQ peoples' experiences in rural settings indicates key concerns.

### *LGBTIQ people and rurality*

Sociological literature around the experiences of rural LGBTIQ people suggests rural areas can be homophobic and value traditional heteronormative gender roles, conservatism, religiosity, and family structures, which may make it difficult for gender diverse individuals to feel accepted (Barefoot Rickard, Smalley & Warren, 2014). Interviews conducted by Yarbrough (2003) found that two of eight lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults living in a rural community felt a sense of isolation, and another five felt there was a lack of likeminded individuals to share their feelings with. Studies in the United States have suggested young people in rural areas may experience more negative outcomes at school when coming out to their peers (Kosciw, Palmer & Kull, 2014). Australian research reflects similar concerns, with one study of over 3000 LGBTIQ students suggesting LGBTIQ young people in rural areas experienced an increased risk of homophobic bullying and violence (Jones, 2015). Another Australian study of same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people found those in rural and remote areas experienced different rates of self-harm and attempted suicides, connected to the isolation, discrimination, and lack of appropriate support they experienced (Hillier et al., 2010). Further, LGBTIQ parents living in outer metropolitan, regional, or rural areas of Australia and New Zealand have reported less social connectedness to their community, including LGBTIQ communities, than those living in urban areas (Power et al., 2014). In 2009, Gottschalk and Newton found that Australian rural gay men and lesbians reported similar discrimination to those in urban environments, but the rural environment intensified this discrimination due to a lack of anonymity. Contrastingly, interviews with 527 LGBTIQ individuals living in nonmetropolitan areas in the United States indicated that individuals enjoyed the close relationships, high quality of life, and involvement with LGBTIQ social networks in their communities (Oswald & Culton, 2003). Living as LGBTIQ people in rural contexts can be positive and negative, but most studies indicate negative experiences are more common, something also highlighted LGBTIQ health research.

While we are yet to determine if urban LGBTIQ people fare better than rural LGBTIQ people (Fisher, Irwin & Coleman, 2014; Wienke & Hill, 2013), there are unique challenges to health care in rural contexts. Qualitative research by Williams, Bowen and Horvath (2005) suggests men who have sex with men (MSM) in rural environments are aware of hostility and wary of violence towards them because of their sexuality. These feelings mean MSM in rural areas often felt uncomfortable speaking about HIV or arranging HIV tests with medical practitioners because they fear disclosing their sexual preferences (Williams et al., 2005). MSM were found to be more comfortable speaking about their sexuality on the internet, a medium perhaps more viable for creating HIV prevention programs with these men in rural areas (Williams et al., 2005). These issues could make LGBTIQ people not access

police when they have been victimised, something further highlighted in mental health research.

Living in rural environments may negatively influence the mental health of LGBTIQ people. Research shows that despite having a similar incidence of lifetime suicide attempts to those in urban areas, transgender persons from rural areas scored significantly poorer on mental health measures (Horvath, Lantaffi, Swinburne-Romine & Bockting, 2014). In 2006, Willging, Salvador and Kano found LGBTIQ people were reluctant to access formal support for mental health issues due to beliefs that mental illness was a sign of weakness and financial considerations (Willging, Salvador & Kano, 2006). Mental health services were also avoided because of a lack of LGBTIQ community services and a fear of anti-LGBTIQ bias, with a number of participants instead seeking help from informal sources (Willging et al., 2006). In a study comparing treatment attitudes of urban and rural drug/alcohol treatment providers, Eliason and Hughes (2004) found urban counsellors reported more education about LGBTIQ issues, and working with more LGBTIQ individuals in the past year, than rural treatment providers. This is concerning given that mental health practitioners would be a key place where LGBTIQ people might seek support as victims in their local communities. We are yet to understand if LGBTIQ people would access police in these circumstances, although recent research on their policing experiences in urban environments suggests they may not.

#### *LGBTIQ people and policing*

LGBTIQ status can produce differential policing experiences in urban environments. International research indicates that LGBTIQ individuals are often subject to hate crimes in the community (Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell, 2005), something identified as a key risk factor for serious negative outcomes in LGBTIQ individuals, including suicidality (Duncan & Hatzenbuehler, 2014). However, LGBTIQ people are reluctant to report hate crimes to police because of previous unsatisfactory policing experiences and a resultant lack of trust, and because they fear homophobia from officers themselves (Hall, 2011). Some studies have found one-quarter of respondents felt they had been victimised or discriminated against by police (Williams & Robinson, 2004).

These fears also apply to LGBTIQ-identifying police officers, with LGBTIQ-identifying police encountering discrimination and harassment from other police in past research (Colvin, 2012). New studies indicate (Jones, 2015; Jones & Williams, 2015) circumstances have improved at least for lesbian-, gay-, and bisexual-identifying police in contexts where police professionalization and protective legislation are in place. Even so, 17% of officers in the most recent study (Jones, 2015) reported experiencing workplace discrimination. This suggests additional reforms are needed, even for LGBTIQ-identifying police, if policing experiences are to improve. It seems pertinent to consider these issues in rural contexts, given these studies were urban and did not elaborate the experiences of LGBTIQ identifying police in rural areas.

Over-policing of LGBTIQ communities may also influence negative police-LGBTIQ relationships. Young LGBTIQ people interviewed by Dwyer (2011) reported feeling targeted by police for looking visibly queer. Participants noted being approached by police for being offensive to public decency when displaying intimacy with a same-sex partner in public (Dwyer, 2011). Further, research suggests LGBTIQ people may more often experience substance abuse (Noell & Ochs, 2001) or homelessness, both of which could attract police attention (Corliss, Goodenow, Nichols & Austin, 2011). They have been found to be subject to more police stops as a result (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011). Even when LGBTIQ people are not engaging in risky behaviours, some feel police assume they are because of generalisations based on their physical appearance (Dwyer, 2014b).

Police have done work to build relationships with LGBTIQ communities in recent times (Tomsen, 2009). Even so, given that queer criminologies more broadly are still only developing, we know relatively little about the policing experiences of LGBTIQ people, and we know even less about the specific link between LGBTIQ status and rural policing environments. This does not mean, however, that insights broadly relating to these concerns have not emerged in urban-focused studies about police-LGBTIQ relationships. The

following section engages with snippets of interview data from research projects about policing LGBTIQ people in urban settings that include reflections on these experiences within rural settings. It does so to highlight the salience of these experiences, and to underscore the need for further research.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The authors of this article have been involved in multiple research projects elaborating the experiences of LGBTIQ people (details below), but given that LGBTIQ people are a 'hard to reach' group (Jones & Newburn, 2001), the focus of these projects has always been the most accessible populations: urban. Nevertheless, there were moments where participants reflected on how policing LGBTIQ people differed in rural contexts. The interview snippets were drawn from three research projects in Queensland and New South Wales, Australia.

The first project interviewed 35 LGBTIQ young people (aged 16 to 25 years) and seven LGBTIQ youth service provider staff about LGBTIQ young peoples' experiences of policing (2008-2009). Participants were recruited from two LGBT youth service providers in Brisbane, Queensland. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Due to the lack of support for LGBTIQ young people in schools (Jones, 2015), most interviews were conducted with young people accessing a major LGBT youth service for diverse, marginalized young LGBTIQ people needing support. Interviews explored their knowledge of police generally, their opinions of police, what they knew about their rights with police, before moving into detailed questions about their interactions with police and the outcomes of these interactions. The interview data is therefore specific to this localized context. All data was audio recorded and transcribed using participant-nominated pseudonyms. Further detail about the project methodology, and how the data was coded and analyzed according to a theoretical framework, is outlined in Dwyer (2014b).

The second project surveyed LGBTIQ people about their experiences with LGBTI (police organisations often leave off the 'Q') police liaison officers (PLO – sometimes referred to as Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers (GLLOs)) in Queensland (QLD), New South Wales (NSW), and Western Australia (WA). Ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the QUT and all three police organizations, and the project underwent administrative ethical review with two other participating universities and four LGBTIQ community organizations marketing the project. An online questionnaire was completed with LGBTIQ people about their experiences with police liaison officers and follow up interviews were undertaken with LGBTIQ respondents that expressed interest at the end of the questionnaire, and with PLOs who expressed interest to an email sent out by LGBTI police liaison program coordinators (2013-2014). Interviews with LGBTIQ people focused on their opinions of police, their overall experiences of police, and, where relevant, their experiences with police liaison officers. All interview data was audio recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms. Further detail about the project methodology, and how the data was coded and analyzed, is outlined in Dwyer et al. (forthcoming).

The third project interviewed lesbian and gay police officers who had previously served with the Queensland Police Service (2009-2010). Participants were approached through advertisements in local queer newspapers and radio announcements. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the QUT. The key focus of these interviews was their experiences of being lesbian or gay in the Queensland Police Service, whether these experiences could be characterised as positive or negative, and what the outcomes of these experiences were. Participants were interviewed using either one-on-one face-to-face or telephone interviews, and a series of email exchanges with the researchers. All data was audio recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms. Further detail about the project methodology, and how the data was coded and analyzed, is outlined in Hayes and Dwyer (2011).

All these projects sought to interview LGBTIQ people living in rural areas, but were relatively unsuccessful with this endeavour. However, some police liaison officers interviewed for the second project had experiences of policing in rural communities.

Although the following snippets are by no means exhaustive (and really amount to ‘passing mentions’ in the data), they have been organised into key themes across the projects to highlight key issues suggesting a focus on policing LGBTIQ people in rural areas is needed in future research. Acknowledging how these projects were undertaken at different times, utilising slightly different methodologies, and targeting different groups, they are discussed together, but are not intended to offer a representative view of rural areas discussed, nor reflect the experiences of all subpopulations in those areas.

### **Policing LGBTIQ people in rural contexts is just different**

The key theme across all three projects, and all pools of participants, was that policing LGBTIQ people in rural contexts was specifically different to urban policing. For the participants, *how* it was specifically different was not necessarily always elaborated, with broader comments around how there are *massive differences between [police] stations, city stations and country stations* (Male, Police Liaison Officer (herein PLO), 1, NSW). However, some respondents did suggest a few key differences.

A key difference noted was how police liaison officers were not distributed across geographic areas (as they are in Queensland and other Australian state and territory police services that have LGBTI police liaison programs), and were instead organised as a small unit of people working out of Brisbane. One liaison officer noted how support to regional areas *would have to be by telephone...the concern for me is you would lose that face to face...most of their work would be remote because they just couldn't reach except by telephone* (Male, PLO, 1, QLD). A related concern was although LGBTIQ people were not particularly numerous in rural areas (Female, PLO, 1, NSW), there were nonetheless very few police trained to understand LGBTIQ issues over huge rural territories. Some community members suggested this was not an issue provided these areas had enough trained liaison officers in each region (Male, Gay, 1, QLD), but others felt this was concerning, with one young person emphasising the difficulties living in rural Australia by saying *we didn't have police in the town itself like the cop shop was an hour and a half away* (Transgender, Female-to-Male, Xavier, 22). Too few officers working across large territories, loss of face-to-face service delivery, and distance to police stations from rural communities are all concerns raised in existing research about policing in rural contexts (Mawby, 2004).

Another key issue, which emerged in interviews with young LGBTIQ people, was homophobia experienced in rural areas, and how this led those young people to relocate to urban areas. As one participant noted, *the city tends to be a haven for people who have been kicked out of home or have been in shelters* (Lesbian, Female, Romeo, 18). Pinky spoke about his experiences in rural Western Australia being *worse because it's a huge strong Catholic community over there, very strict, very isolated. I was bullied because of my homosexuality* (Male, Gay, Pinky, 18). Sarah (Transgender, Male to Female, 17) noted how relatives in regional Queensland were *not very good with the whole gay thing because they were brought up in Rockhampton, which is a very closed minded, small area*. Other young people had very problematic experiences with police:

*One cop up in Toowoomba hit me three times in the gut...I was yelling about something and I wouldn't give the CIB any information because it was mates that decided to do something stupid. They had dogs searching for us and everything and they pretty much picked us up and threw us in the back of the paddy wagon...they didn't even tell us a reason why...Then they took us to the police station and the CIB there, I wouldn't give him any information and he hit me three times in the gut* (Male, Bisexual, No Name, 19).

Interestingly, No Name later states in the interview: *I don't blame the cops for being a little bit aggressive...I wasn't aggressive to the cops in Toowoomba, they were aggressive against me because I knew something and they wanted it out of me* (Male, Bisexual, No Name, 19). Police violence directed at young LGBTIQ people in rural areas is clearly unacceptable, and has been documented to some extent in other research about LGBT young people (Dwyer,

2011). Experiences like these, combined with homophobia experienced in rural communities, indicates strongly the need to examine these issues further, especially if we are to better understand if police harassment and rough treatment of this person was motivated by sexuality and/or gender diversity.

Young people's comments differed somewhat from concerns raised by police liaison officers who spoke more about operational problems that rural areas produced for policing. For example, these officers suggested that police services were not using regional LGBTI police liaison officers they had in the most productive ways. A female LGBTI police liaison officer from New South Wales suggested there were too many LGBTI police liaison officers in regional areas of New South Wales: *there are a lot of GLLOS regional, out in those areas and I think it's just that needs are different. You just don't probably need to have as many in Dubbo as you do in Surrey Hills* (Female, Police Liaison Officer, 1, NSW). Other LGBTI police liaison officers supported these comments noting how LGBTI issues in city areas are *more of a focus than country areas* (Male, Police Liaison Officer, 2, NSW) and the region overall was described as *city centric*:

*I think geography has a lot to do with it as well. In NSW obviously you can become a bit city centric so obviously that's how this organisation works, that the headquarters are in the city so that is obviously where those people would be based. In my opinion a lot of the work in the city has been done, there is still more we can do of course but it is regional areas that we need to be working really hard on* (Male, Police Liaison Officer, 2, NSW).

With such a focus on the city areas, this respondent suggests police support for LGBTIQ people in rural areas is neglected as an area of concern.

One instance of data in the project on LGBTI police liaison officers diverged from examples above in that the rural context shaped positive police experiences. A lesbian female living in remote far north Queensland elaborates on not being able to access police liaison officers at all in metropolitan areas, and then having more support and more positive experiences with Aboriginal liaison officers in the remote area in which she now lived. She talked about how she would not have been living and working in that remote region had she not had to pay off significant legal debts resulting from ongoing legal battles with members of her family that were homophobic and abusive towards her (Female, Lesbian, 3, QLD). She elaborates her frustration with multiple unsuccessful attempts to speak with a LGBTI police liaison officer about these issues in a metropolitan area. She then talks about how the Aboriginal liaison officers in the remote community she had moved to were very supportive, although they could not change her circumstances (as the case she wanted support with had already been decided in court). Although she was unhappy with her experience of not being able to contact a LGBTI police liaison officer when she needed one, she notes that her experiences with police in rural areas were more positive. A young person noted similar experiences, saying that when he was *in the outback or whatever you want to call it and I talked to some police officers there, they were really cool* (Male, Gay, Damien, 18). Although existing research about policing in rural settings suggests community members may have higher expectations of police (Weisheit et al., 1994), we cannot assume these higher expectations are not being met and experiences will be necessarily unsatisfactory. Importantly, though, it does show we need further empirical research to elaborate these experiences in detail. These comments, and those above, suggest broadly that there are many complex ways rural policing experiences may be different for LGBTIQ people, as the discussion about relocation and mobility of police officers below also suggests.

### **Relocation of rural officers impacts on availability of police who know LGBTI issues**

A key issue to emerge out of the three projects was the idea of rural placement, reallocation, and relocation of police officers. Importantly, none of these issues have been raised in existing literature to date. Participants discuss how officers in rural areas can be well-trained and have productive relationships with people in rural communities, but when they are



reallocated upon completion of rural service, these communities lose this local knowledge and support. For instance, one gay male talked about how there was a well-trained and supportive LGBTI police liaison officer in far north Queensland. However, since that person relocated:

*...that leaves someone there to be replaced. So it would be difficult because people move around in the police. And then you have to retrain. Like I said earlier when people start the force they should have the training so they know it from the outset...it's easier for them all to have a better and deeper understanding of it all (Gay, Male, 1, QLD).*

These themes were mirrored in interviews with LGBTI police liaison officers. A female program coordinator in Western Australia discussed how there were less LGBTI police liaison officers in regional areas because *some of the positions have been, shall we say, reallocated to other duties*. These comments suggest that losing the knowledge, and possibly institutional memory, with LGBTI police liaison officers may be a key issue in policing LGBTIQ people in rural areas.

Discussions around relocation and rural placement differed significantly in only one instance, and this instance emerged during discussions about the historical experiences of former gay and lesbian police officers in Queensland. In this project, one lesbian female former officer talked at length about how the investigation into lesbians in the Queensland Police Service, launched in 1977, caused her to be outed as a lesbian and she was forced by senior police officials to transfer and relocate permanently to a remote area in Queensland. Her long-term female partner, also a police officer at the time, was forced to transfer and relocate to a similarly remote area, but to a region more than seven hours away from where she was stationed. She notes that officers in the new remote station had been *forewarned* about her and they *knew all about me*. She concluded that *his [officer in charge] brief was to try and get me to resign, so he made life fairly difficult for me and it was very hard* (Lesbian, Female, Former QLD Police Officer). It is clear that historically, rural transfers have been invoked as a form of punishment for lesbian officers. The combination of rurality with ongoing homophobia from police she worked with, in this example, demonstrates the need to investigate further if these practices still persist, and to assess their ongoing impact. Although these experiences happened 'in the past', historical policing practices can have long term, wide reaching impacts upon LGBTIQ people (Dwyer, 2014a). This is particularly important considering other comments from different interviews suggest the effectiveness of rural policing experiences of LGBTIQ people may be shaped significantly by these contexts.

### **Effectiveness of policing LGBTIQ people in rural areas depends on outreach**

Many interview comments with police liaison officers and LGBTIQ people noted that the effectiveness of police in rural areas varied significantly. A Queensland gay male noted how, even though they had a lot of LGBTI police liaison officers in north Queensland at one point, the general mobility and turnover of rural police officers meant these officers did not stay long term. If these officers do not stay in one place for long enough, the effectiveness of LGBTI police liaison officers can be eroded. The notion that a rural area loses knowledgeable police does not appear to be widely discussed in existing empirical research, and may well be an issue specific to officers with specialised knowledge, as existing studies focus instead on concerns around the lack of availability of officers generally (Mawby, 2004). Interestingly, a female police liaison officer from Western Australia noted the flip side of this, saying that although rural LGBTI police liaison officers can do great work connecting with these communities long term, they can also become too settled in those areas and the line between social and work responsibilities can be blurred. These issues have been raised in existing research about policing rural environments, with role conflict being raised as a key problem (Jobes, 2003).

Participants also reflected on how policing effectiveness with LGBTIQ people depended on the level of outreach work that police did with rural communities. They suggested that if

police were not known well in rural communities, LGBTIQ people would not access support when they needed it. A gay male notes that to build effective relationships between LGBTIQ people and police, police in regional areas need:

*...to have police participation in community events like Sydney and Melbourne have, and for that to take place across Queensland in all the regions. There are community events happening across the state in Cairns in Townsville and other things, and to have the police taking part in those (Male, Gay, 1, QLD).*

Comments by LGBTI police liaison officers also reflected these concerns, saying the focus of police liaison officer work in rural areas is networking:

*I live in Victoria and work in NSW so on a border town...So all up 126,000 square kilometres. So it's big and there is a gay community but nowhere near the number in the city...So like out here I have been involved in some stuff in Victoria like going to social meetings, gay lesbian social groups, both in the capacity as a GLLO and on duty. Had a few dealings with legal groups in Broken Hill, did a lot of gay fact sheets (Female, PLO, 1, NSW).*

To police LGBTIQ people effectively in rural areas, the key focus needs to be on networking and getting to know people, which is different to supporting urban LGBTIQ people where *there is a myriad of different things that you can be involved in* (Female, PLO, 1, NSW) without necessarily being involved in lots of community engagement work. These themes have been raised in existing studies about policing rural areas (Jobes, 2003), but this presents specific concerns about policing LGBTIQ people, because many LGBTIQ people avoid police completely (Berman & Robinson, 2010; Dwyer, 2011).

Comments made by LGBTI police liaison officers reflected that rural settings did significantly impact on how they balanced their workloads and how they engaged with LGBTIQ people in their communities. For example, one officer noted that *that's hard for me because you could sit back and no one would know to ask for your help...as a GLLO in the city and depending on your work location, you can have a lot more calls for service* (Female, PLO, 1, NSW). Others reflected similar concerns:

*It varies a lot. In areas like Surrey Hills, New Town, Sydney CBD, they have a number of GLLOS per station and they get together and they are really passionate about the role, and because they have the community there is always something to do. Whereas somewhere out towards the suburbs or even country towns, I'm not too sure what their workload is like. I know for me here it is very difficult to do much because the community for the large part is not there (Male, PLO, 3, NSW).*

*I suppose in Roma I probably only did one or two jobs while I was there in three years. So if they're not getting called on and used that much then... I mean and that was two jobs with me being proactive, whereas the ones in all the other places, if they just stick a poster up in the front of the station and that's it and they're not actually engaging (Male, PLO, 4, QLD).*

This suggests rural contexts differentiate in terms of calls for service. If there is outreach work being done in these contexts, it does not necessarily amount to officers having more calls for service. The officer in the second quote above added that he was later stationed in a city area and had many calls for service using the same proactive approach he adopted in the regional area, even though when he left that area *it all got shit-canned basically* (Male, PLO, 4, QLD). In rural areas it seems that, even if a liaison officer is being proactive, this does not equate to LGBTIQ people requesting support with issues they are experiencing. Even more frustratingly, the proactive approaches built up in regional areas can fall away entirely when a

proactive officer is relocated. These concerns contrast with existing research showing high levels of job satisfaction amongst rural police (Jobes, 2003) as these officers raise a number of concerns they believe impact on effective policing in rural environments, as well as influencing overall satisfaction with their police role. Clearly these issues would also shape whether or not a LGBTIQ person sought support from a rural police officer, something also considerably influenced by homophobia generally.

### **LGBTIQ people in rural areas fear homophobic police responses**

A final theme emerging multiple times in interview responses of participants across the projects was police homophobia in rural areas. Police homophobia has been documented in multiple studies of policing with LGBTIQ people (Berman & Robinson, 2010; Dwyer, 2011; Williams & Robinson, 2004). Concerns over police homophobia emerged in discussions with police officers who experienced homophobia from other officers working in rural stations (discussed above). However, the more common concern with policing LGBTIQ people in rural locations was homophobia that LGBTIQ community members experienced from rural communities, and how this influenced their willingness to seek police support. One police liaison officer suggested in relation to homophobic hate crime that *you do hear stories about stuff happening in the regions* (Male, PLO, 5, QLD). Participants were most commonly concerned with how LGBTIQ people were reluctant to ask for support from police due to fears about police homophobia. As one gay male noted:

*Unfortunately people don't report stuff to the police. Like it might be a bashing but they don't take it further because they have their own fears about their sexuality so they don't go to the next step of having the incident dealt with. And that does happen especially in the smaller regions* (Male, Gay, 1, QLD).

This participant notes further how gay men *in the closet or away from the mainstream are much more at risk of violence or infection, and they can be harder to reach especially in the small country towns*. He suggests these should be focus areas for rural LGBTI police liaison officers, as the fear of police homophobia can cause people not to seek support.

Police officers interviewed also suggested that fear of police homophobia was a key issue, but noted it was the overall awareness of how widespread homophobia can be in rural areas that shaped personal policing responses to situations involving LGBTIQ people. For instance, when working in city areas, in situations where one officer recognised that domestic violence was happening between two same-sex partners, the officer would not hesitate to ask questions about this: *I'd walk into a place straight away and go 'Oh okay, this is DV, these people are together'. My partner wouldn't have a clue* (Female, PLO, 2, QLD), but then added quickly *I can't see it happening in the rural areas*. Although this officer stopped short of saying her concerns about homophobia in rural areas would *prevent* her from asking further questions about whether or not someone was LGBTIQ, it is clear she thought that in rural spaces, doing this would be uncomfortable. These are considerable issues to overcome as, even though police organisations have worked hard to improve relationships with LGBTIQ people, we are yet to document how homophobia from rural communities impacts LGBTIQ people's decisions to access police support. More importantly, we are also yet to explore how rural homophobia shapes everyday policing practices of individual officers.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Where to from here?**

The brief insights drawn from these studies of LGBTIQ people both being policed and policing in rural areas reveal unique challenges that must be addressed to ensure policing is just, equitable, and effective. Clearly, rural spaces are difficult spaces for police to manage to ensure the equitable delivery of policing services to LGBTIQ people. There are resourcing and personnel concerns (common issues with rural policing) which impact in specific ways for these groups (Jobes, 2003). The frequent turnover of police, as well as the reallocation of

already stretched resources impact on all policing in rural areas (Mawby, 2004), but their effects may be keenly felt in police-LGBTIQ relations.

The examples of police liaison programs above demonstrate this. While liaison programs may be the dominant urban model for police-community engagement, the larger size of rural commands, relative lack of resources to address unique challenges, fewer liaison officers, and lower population of sexuality and gender diverse people in rural areas all combine to impact on the delivery of liaison – not to mention broader – policing services (Dwyer et al., forthcoming). Officers clearly find it difficult to develop and maintain a connection to LGBTIQ communities and establish a trusting relationship with them, something necessary for a greater uptake of liaison (and more general police) services and to ensure the reporting of homophobic and transphobic hate crime in rural areas. As a result of these challenges, it has become incumbent on individual officers in rural areas to increase their outreach to, and networking with, LGBTIQ people in their community. They take on this task in addition to normal duties as a police officer – something undoubtedly more difficult in large rural territories where there are few 'feet on the ground', and a limited presence of LGBTIQ community groups. The turnover of such officers does not contribute to the long-term viability of these initiatives, and reduces the institutional memory necessary for successfully embedded liaison services. As such, the glimpses of policing in rural areas afforded by the data above suggests not only the need for further research, but also to rethink more taken for granted methods for police engagement with LGBTI people. We are yet to know if restricted opening hours of police stations, for instance, impacts specifically on the policing needs of LGBTIQ people (Mawby, 2004).

While participants said nothing specific about transphobia, the data does demonstrate how rural areas represent homophobic spaces (Barefoot Rickard, Smalley & Warren, 2014). Whether this is because research participants had direct personal experiences of homophobia in these spaces, or they held this view because of what they heard from others, it remains that these spaces are considered dangerous for LGBTIQ people, and this impacts on their interactions with police, just as it impacts on the schooling experiences of LGBTIQ young people coming out (Kosciw, Palmer & Kull, 2014). Concerningly, police themselves have used this view of rural areas to punish a lesbian officer by explicitly transferring her to a rural area knowing it was homophobic, as a punishment for being lesbian and hoping she would leave the police. While this incident was historical, it nevertheless reinforces a view of rural spaces as homophobic, which may serve as a barrier in the interactions between LGBTIQ people and police, even if LGBTIQ people feel more supported by community organisations (Oswald & Culton, 2003).

None of these findings are particularly unexpected, given the extant literature in related fields that we have surveyed here. Some findings are extensions of themes previously identified in research, which already note how diverse groups encounter unique challenges in rural areas (Garland & Chakraborti, 2007), that there are problems with service provision in those areas (Morant & Edwards, 2011; Weisheit et al. 1994), that homophobia and transphobia exist (Hillier et al., 2010), and that police relations with LGBTIQ people are complex (Dwyer, 2011). However, the brief data in this article point to the necessity of exploring in further detail the experiences of LGBTIQ people policing and being policed in rural areas. Ensuring emerging queer criminologies recognise rural contexts in such research, and that future rural criminology recognises the unique rural experiences of LGBTIQ people, are important steps. These moves will not only assist the development of both fields of research, but will ensure that our understandings of LGBTIQ criminal justice experiences in rural spaces is as thorough as possible.

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