

Policing and the LGBTQ2S+ community in Canada

Canadian police services have attempted to repair their relations with LGBTQ2S+ communities in recent years. However, the legacy of historical anti-LGBTQ2S+ policing and the current dissatisfaction with police investigations, use of force, and treatment of BIPOC LGBTQ2S+ individuals inhibit continued progress. The role of police as the state's enforcement arm in the exclusion and persecution of sexual and gender minorities will likely colour the dynamic between police and LGBTQ2S+ individuals—particularly those who are doubly marginalized—for generations.

POLICE–LGBTQ2S+ RELATIONS IN CANADA

Even after Canada decriminalized homosexuality in 1969, LGBTQ2S+ individuals remained the subjects of police criminalization, as efforts to regulate the spaces and lives of people with non-normative genders and sexualities continued. One of the most notable police actions against the Canadian LGBTQ2S+ community took place in 1981, when the Toronto Police raided men's bathhouses, leading to large-scale protests that eventually birthed what is now known as Pride Toronto (McCaskell, 2016).

Canadian police have since moved away from overt actions against LGBTQ2S+ individuals. While efforts to engage the LGBTQ2S+ community are now the explicit priority of many police services, critics argue that police work continues to disproportionately affect LGBTQ2S+ individuals—especially those who experience multiple forms of marginalization—but is now cloaked in arguments that justify enforcement under the guise of public safety and morality (Lvovsky, 2020). This makes the regulation of LGBTQ2S+ identities more insidious and difficult to identify, particularly by the general public and those within the community who are outwardly accepted by

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police and influenced by the adoption of LGBTQ2S+ image work within policing (McCaskell, 2016).

DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES IN THE LGBTQ2S+ COMMUNITY

Among those in the LGBTQ2S+ community who have taken a strong stance against this continued regulation are its BIPOC members. A wave of demonstrations initiated by the Toronto chapter of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLMTO) in 2016 aimed to draw attention to police-perpetrated anti-Black racism. After being invited to Pride Toronto as an honoured group to recognize their work, BLMTO halted Toronto's 2016 Pride parade to protest Black erasure in Pride, as well as police participation in the parade. Their action drew attention to the diversity of experiences within the LGBTQ2S+ community and the particular vulnerability of queer and trans people of colour to police violence or inaction (Furman et al., 2018).

The bitterly divided response across the country only served to further reflect the differences within the LGBTQ2S+ community. While some community members wholeheartedly support police, many others feel that police presence is threatening, to the degree that some are not comfortable participating in Pride celebrations. Furman et al. (2018) note that BLMTO's action brought the "white supremacy that occurs within the LGBTQ community" to the foreground (p. 49). This was particularly evident in the nature of the media and public response to BLMTO's action: the organization was

villainized and its members were cast as outsiders, despite the fact that many of the activists identified as LGBTQ2S+.

HOMONORMATIVITY AND THE EXCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED "OTHERS"

These vastly different experiences within the community reflect what Duggan (2002) terms "homonormativity." While police culture is thought to be particularly threatened by non-normative sexualities and gender presentations, some forms of queerness have become officially accepted by police organizations. However, Duggan (2002) argues that the mainstreaming of queer identities is selective and continues to support the structure of heteronormativity that has historically been used to marginalize non-normative sexualities. Certain forms of homosexuality and gender expression by queer individuals—in particular those that mirror traditional heterosexual relationships—are now considered acceptable, while others are still subordinated. This "homonormativity" has been used to explain the exclusion of BIPOC and otherwise marginalized individuals from the LGBTQ2S+ community; they do not fit the ideal of the "imagined 'good queer citizen,' [who] is typically cisgendered, white(ned), middle-class or aspiring and able-bodied" (Russell, 2019, p. 366).

Some scholars contend that the apparent improvement in the relationship between LGBTQ2S+ communities and the police is nothing more than "pinkwashing," whereby the police present themselves as progressive to mask their ongoing transgressions against more marginalized LGBTQ2S+ individuals (McCaskell, 2016). Pinkwashing often manifests in Pride celebrations, which moved from protests of police brutality to prioritizing corporate and police involvement; these organizations are accused of

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using their participation as a tool to pink-wash their image. This shift reflects the interests of so-called respectable queers, who embody the homonormative ideal, rather than more marginalized members of the community (Russell, 2019).

Pinkwashing such as this is made possible by a “homonationalist” state, a term coined by Puar (2007) to describe a nation that prides itself on its tolerance of queer identities and adopts that tolerance as a defining characteristic. However, the benevolence that homonationalist states extend to sexual others is dependent on their conformity to a narrow, homonormative standard. These individuals become worthy of state protection and cultural and legal citizenship, to the detriment of other marginalized bodies. As McCaskell (2016) states, Canada “regularly forgets its national roots in settler colonialism, racism, and exploitation,” and its proud acceptance of homonormative queerness is “deployed as proof that Canada is the liberal country it imagines itself to be” (p. 1302). However, those who do not embody the queer ideal have not been absorbed into the national fabric, and rather than becoming part of a protected class, they continue to be policed and criminalized in

much the same way that all LGBTIQ2S+ people once were.

Greey (2018) argues that when marginalized people protest their exclusion, as BLMTO did, their disruption of Canada’s image as a benevolent, queer-friendly haven and refusal to act as “grateful queers” is met with disapproval and condemnation (p. 670). Further, those who benefit from homonationalism may fail to recognize the inequality of the privileges granted to members of their community. These individuals, who have relatively high levels of political clout, have typically been given a platform to speak for the LGBTIQ2S+ community. However, differences within the community necessitate explorations of policing that reflect various experiences and perceptions; the community is not monolithic, and scholarship must not treat queer and trans individuals’ opinions as such. 🍁

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