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Can We Have Your ID Please? *Understanding Differential LGBTQ+ Perceptions of the Police Through a Queer Theory and Procedural Justice Lens*

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ABSTRACT

Going beyond simplistic overgeneralization, this study analyses how diversity within the LGBTQ+ community is associated with differential perspectives on, and trust in, the police in Rotterdam. It utilizes queer theory concepts like heteronormativity and homonationalism to achieve a more complex and accurate understanding of LGBTQ+ perceptions and experiences and employs procedural justice theory to understand how these perceptions and experiences result in (dis)trust in the police. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 participants in Rotterdam. The results demonstrate that perceptions around the police are more negative, and less homogeneous than quantitative surveys indicate—even in a country where tolerance of sexual minorities is relatively high. Differential acceptance of diversity in queerness under the LGBTQ+ umbrella seems to be crucial in shaping LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police, with “visibly queer” individuals being less accepted, and often holding more negative perceptions of the police. Future research should thus expand on how the various sub-groups within the LGBTQ+ spectrum perceive the police, and how trust can be improved, for example by strengthening the visibility of the PinkinBlue unit within the police.

KEYWORDS

Heteronormativity; homonationalism; LGBTQ+; police; queer theory

Introduction

The Netherlands has historically been at the forefront of LGBTQ+ rights, exemplified by the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1971, the recognition of same-sex marriage in 1998, and the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation in 1994. After Iceland, the Netherlands has the highest societal acceptance of homosexuality in Europe (Government of the Netherlands, 2018), making the Netherlands a frontrunner in LGBTQ+ rights. The Netherlands is also known for various initiatives to foster cooperation and trust between police and LGBTQ+ groups, such as its inclusive policing units

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like the “pink in blue” (*roze in blauw*), a police network for LGBTQ+ communities, which has, for example, participated in pride parades in the country for many years. Existing studies indeed paint a relatively positive picture of LGBTQ+ perspectives of the police in the Netherlands (Huijnk et al., 2022; Jonas & Feddes, 2020). For example, a large quantitative study (Huijnk et al., 2022), demonstrates that LGB people are, on average, just as positive about police performance, functioning, and availability as their heterosexual counterparts. Such findings stand in marked contrast with other countries, like the United States, which during the 20th century, oversaw massive instances of discrimination, violence, and marginalization enacted by the police toward LGBTQ+ people, which contributed to distrust of the police among LGBTQ+ communities (Daum, 2019).

The term LGBTQ+ encompasses Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer individuals, with the “plus” sign accommodating other identities such as intersex and asexual individuals. While most of the terms suggest clear-cut identity markers around sexual orientation and gender identity, recent narratives argue for a more fluid and encompassing definition of sexual and gender identity (Sedgwick, 2008). This evolution has led to the adoption of the term “Queer” as an umbrella term reflecting a spectrum of identities and diverse experiences. It aims to recognize the potential societal marginalization faced by a broader range of individuals based on their gender and sexual identity.

Making comparisons between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ groups within a given country is important, but also risks resulting in overgeneralizations and a reinforcement of simplistic perspectives on LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ identities. The tendency to overgeneralize such identities is notably illustrated, for example, by the exclusion of non-binary, queer, and/or transgender participants in the Dutch studies mentioned. In line, with academic discussions that highlight how differential societal attitudes about, and institutional responses toward LGBTQ+ people depend on their perceived adherence to conventional social norms (Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011), the present research thus aims to explore how relevant heterogeneities within “the” LGBTQ+ community are associated with (dis)trust in the police.

Focusing on Rotterdam, the second largest city in the Netherlands, we ask: How does diversity within the LGBTQ+ community shape perspectives on, and trust in, the police? We answer this question by employing a critical queer theory lens that recognizes that the complex interplay of sexuality, gender, and race produces different identities within the LGBTQ+ community, resulting in heterogeneous perspectives on the police, which include rather negative perceptions.

By focusing on intersecting LGBTQ+ identities, this research thus explores a more nuanced and accurate portrayal of LGBTQ+ perspectives on the police in Rotterdam. In so doing, it contributes to Queer Criminology, which increasingly gains recognition within the field of criminology, but still has

many areas to be explored (Buist & Stone, 2014; Dwyer, 2011; Shields, 2021). Additionally, the research connects Queer theory to a procedural justice perspective by assuming that (dis)trust in the police ultimately depends on a person's experiences with, and perceptions of, the four "pillars" of procedural justice—citizen participation in dialogs, neutrality in decision-making, dignity/respect, and trustworthy motives, and that different subgroups within "the" LGBTQ+ community clearly have a different take on these pillars. Using Queer Criminology and a Queer Theory lens, this research applies concepts such as heteronormativity (Warner, 1991) and homonationalism (Puar, 2007) to the debate around police trust.

The societal significance of this research lies in its contribution to a more nuanced understanding of LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police and its correlation with trust in law enforcement. As a historically marginalized sexual and gender minority, this study offers crucial insights into the experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ+ individuals, providing a platform to shed light on their actions and thoughts. By doing so, it underscores the importance of addressing LGBTQ+ issues within the broader discourse on social justice, equality, and human rights. Moreover, this research aspires to catalyze positive societal change by offering practical insights that may be instrumental in improving the relationship between the police and LGBTQ+ communities. For instance, the findings could inform the development of targeted sensitivity training programs and the formulation of more inclusive policies. By implementing these recommendations, law enforcement agencies can actively work toward fostering a more supportive and understanding environment, thereby contributing to positive social transformation.

Theoretical framework

Trust

Trust in law enforcement is a multifaceted construct influenced not only by the efficacy of crime control but also by the nature of interactions between the police and the public. Tyler (2005) posits a process-based model of policing, emphasizing the significance of these interactions. The procedural-justice perspective, as delineated by Tyler (2005), provides a nuanced understanding of how perceived fairness and respect in police conduct shapes trust. Procedural justice, at its core, encompasses the overall levels of fairness and transparency exhibited by the police (Hough et al., 2011). This perspective considers various police interactions, ranging from engagements with victims and suspected criminals to general interactions with the public. The four pillars of procedural justice—citizen participation in dialogs, neutrality in decision-making, dignity/respect, and trustworthy motives (Mazerolle et al., 2013)—emerge as foundational elements impacting trust in the police (Tyler,

2005). These pillars also represent useful building blocks to help understand LGBTQ+ perspectives on the police; if different subgroups among the LGBTQ+ community differ considerably in (dis)trust in the police, the variation is likely to be related to different assessments of one or more of the four foundational pillars of trust. Various studies in the United States and Australia have demonstrated that a procedural justice perspective on LGBTQ+ trust in the police is a vital, albeit relatively unexplored perspective to understand LGBTQ+ perspectives on the police (Dario et al., 2020; Miles-Johnson, 2013; Nadal et al., 2015). For example, Miles-Johnson (2013) found that respondents who identified as LGBTI were more critical about various aspects of procedural justice—e.g. the extent to which police treats citizens equally—than heterosexual participants. A procedural justice lens can thus help understand the perspectives of different groups in society, and identify the distinctive challenges they might face regarding the criminal justice system (Nadal et al., 2015).

Heteronormativity and the police

Heteronormativity, a concept advanced by queer theorists, scrutinizes societal and institutional structures concerning sexuality and gender. It assumes that heterosexual identities are the societal norm, leading to a problematization and marginalization of non-cishetero identities. Beyond individual beliefs and behaviors, it extends to institutional norms, reflecting structures and orientations that not only organize heterosexuality as a sexuality but also as a privilege (Berlant & Warner, 1998). Institutionalized heteronormativity is prevalent within police organizations, as corroborated by studies such as that conducted in the United States on Gay and Lesbian police officers dealing with homophobia (Myers et al., 2004). The institution of the police tends to actively reinforce conformity by endorsing heterosexual and “hegemonic masculine” norms, where hegemonic masculinity encompasses traits such as authority, aggressiveness, technical competence, and heterosexist desire (Dario et al., 2020; Myers et al., 2004). Such masculinity intersects with heteronormative norms and codetermines LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police, representing a mechanism for understanding the marginalization propagated by heteronormativity. Moreover, perceptions of a “machismo” culture within the police, including the Dutch police (Jonas & Feddes, 2020), underscore the existence of heteronormative norms within law enforcement organizations across the globe. Heteronormativity can contribute to distrust in the police among LGBTQ+ populations, which can lead to LGBTQ+ marginalization, as indicated, for instance, in the underreporting of crimes and diminished access to criminal justice. The enforcement of heteronormative standards by police is especially pronounced concerning “visibly queer bodies” (cf. Dwyer, 2021), putting unwelcome pressure on LGBTQ+ people to conform to

heteronormative standards to escape police scrutiny. “Visible queerness” refers to the way a person exhibits, or is believed to exhibit, their queer identity, which often stands in contrast with and in defiance of the heteronormative norms around, clothing, make-up, and behaviors, especially if these behaviors challenge societal expectations (Dwyer, 2021). Visibility is known to be an important, though problematic aspect, of the policing of public space as it serves as a crucial element in the social construction of deviance and “out-of-placeness” (cf. Cook & Whowell, 2011).

It is noteworthy that procedural justice theory, emphasizing normative perspectives on police conduct rather than an instrumental viewpoint (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003), serves as an apt operationalization for heteronormative police perceptions. It is thus plausible that the four pillars of procedural justice will be weaker among persons with a more visibly queer identity, or a relatively strong desire to be visibly queer: such citizens are less likely to experience dignity/respect, will be more critical about police trustworthiness, are likely to experience lower neutrality by police in decision-making, and may also feel that they cannot participate in dialogs on an equal footing without having to pass as heteronormative.

Homonationalism

Homonationalism, a concept gaining prominence within the LGBTQ+ movement, critically examines how states deploy and utilize LGBTQ+ identities (Puar, 2007; Schotten, 2016). States endorse LGBTQ+ identities to the extent that they conform to normalized “western” notions of citizenship while marginalizing those deviating from this norm (Schotten, 2016). Homonationalism underscores the intersectionality of identities within the LGBTQ+ spectrum, revealing diverse power dynamics. Notably, it distances issues of class, race, and gender from sexual identity, prioritizing a gay white-middle-class identity as the accepted norm (Puar, 2007). Current research underscores the favoritism inherent in homonationalism, privileging certain LGBTQ+ individuals while marginalizing others, particularly ethnic minorities. Within the Dutch context, homonationalistic narratives reveal a complex dynamic, where the Netherlands projects itself as an LGBTQ+friendly nation while simultaneously engaging in discriminatory practices against various marginalized communities, including subgroups within the LGBTQ+ community (Aydemir, 2012; Puar, 2007; Spierings, 2021). Such discriminatory tendencies are evident, for example, in narratives attempting to establish Islam and ethnic minorities as a threat to LGBTQ+ identities (Puar, 2007), underscoring the normalization of certain queer bodies while perpetuating discriminatory attitudes toward other LGBTQ+ identities. Puar and Akachar emphasize the critical examination of LGBTQ+ acceptance within a Dutch context, highlighting the need to address the disparities within marginalized communities. The police, in embracing

homonationalistic practices, may well have become producers of such practices, pushing some queer bodies into protected spaces while excluding others, particularly concerning race and gender. Variations in trust levels across LGBTQ+ subgroups, as evidenced by lower trust reported by Lesbian, Bisexual women, and Transgender people compared to other LGBTQ+ subgroups (Dario et al., 2020; Hodge & Sexton, 2020), underscore the differentiation in police perceptions within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Discrepancies in police treatment among LGBTQ+ subgroups, such as higher levels of discriminatory police interactions reported by transgender women of color compared to white transgender women in the United States (Buist & Stone, 2014), highlight the necessity of understanding police perceptions across diverse LGBTQ+ identities, and in interaction with other status characteristics.

Perception of support and inclusion

Perceptions of support and shared characteristics with the LGBTQ+ community significantly influence LGBTQ+ perspectives of the police. Despite concerns of misgendering, harassment, and a lack of seriousness by the police (Shields, 2021), policies mitigating these fears impact police perception. Police officers who are knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ issues and treat them seriously contribute to enhanced cooperation, trust, and communication between the police and the LGBTQ+ community (Kirkup, 2013). LGBTQ+ liaison police units play a crucial role in increasing the visibility and inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals within the police (Dwyer et al., 2017; Hodge & Sexton, 2020; Kirkup, 2013). The presence of LGBTQ+ representation within police institutions in Rotterdam will likely increase positive perceptions of the police. Such initiatives, are likely to increase the feeling that LGBTQ+ people are more included in dialog that there is more neutrality in decision-making, more dignity/respect, and trustworthy motives, thus increasing trust and positive perceptions of the police.

Context

Initiatives and support groups in the Netherlands targeting LGBTQ+ individuals, such as the PinkinBlue initiative, distinguish the country from others in Europe. Created in 1998 in response to the Amsterdam “Gay Games,” PinkinBlue was positively received by both the public and the police organization (Colvin, 2020). Working in close partnership with organizations like COC—a national interest group for LGBTQ+ communities—and the Discrimination Reporting Center (Savenije, 2015), it also engages in community outreach activities and campaigns. Its objective is to create a publicly visible network of LGBTQ+ police officers who can more easily respond to the specific demands of LGBTQ+ people, such as

discrimination, harassment, and bullying, while also supporting LGBTQ+ officers in the organization (Politie.nl, 2024).¹ The initiative envisions a dedicated police unit highly informed about LGBTQ+ issues, where a significant proportion of officers identify as LGBTQ+ themselves, thus promoting acceptance and representation within the police institution itself. Indeed, Hodge and Sexton (2020) demonstrate that having such “out” police officers—which is more difficult to achieve in countries with stronger institutional barriers and heteronormative environments—improves police-LGBTQ+ relationships. Jonas and Feddes (2020), too, find that LGBTQ+ individuals have more confidence in the PinkinBlue unit than in traditional police. The initiative counters the prevalent machismo culture within the police, promotes participation and external representation, and thus contributes to increased trust in the police among LGBTQ+ individuals (Jonas & Feddes, 2020).

Rotterdam has historically amoreconservative and working class identity in comparison to Amsterdam, but has been undergoing considerable gentrification in recent years (cf. Custers & Willems, 2024). In 2015, around 90% of all (randomly sampled) Rotterdam residents expressed positive attitudes toward gay men (IDEM, 2019). Unfortunately, to our knowledge, there is currently no quantitative data on public attitudes in Rotterdam toward trans and non-binary people. Prominent LGBTQ+ organizations that aim to address the needs of LGBTQ+ in Rotterdam are Hang-out 010, Queer Rotterdam Collective, and Respect2Love.

Discrimination of LGBTQ+ people remains a serious concern in Rotterdam, in 2017 around 27% of all police reports on discrimination were due to someone’s sexual/gender identity (IDEM, 2019). LGBTQ+ people reported feeling less safe than their cisgender-heterosexual counterparts, and especially trans people faced higher instances of discrimination (COC, 2022). LGBTQ+ residents in Rotterdam reported feeling invisible and vulnerable, especially when compared to Amsterdam (Van der Tuin et al., 2019). Especially people who are visibly queer tended to face increased discrimination and harassment, leading many people in Rotterdam to conform to heteronormative standards to increase feelings of safety, this holds especially true for Rotterdam South, a socioeconomically disadvantaged and ethnically highly diverse area, where LGBTQ+ people feel the most unsafe (Van der Tuin et al., 2019). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ residents in Rotterdam underline negative police interactions when reporting hate crimes. A study by Radar demonstrated that some LGBTQ+ people reported being ignored by the police when reporting hate crimes or being asked insensitive questions that made them feel unsafe (Van der Tuin et al., 2019). While the study only addresses LGBTQ+ interactions with the police superficially, this research seeks to elaborate an intersectional and in-depth exploration of LGBTQ+ perspectives on the police in Rotterdam.

In 2002, 9.3% of police officers in operational duty in Rotterdam had a (“non-western”) immigration background, against 40% of the population in Rotterdam; and about 40% were women (CBS, 2021).² The skewed ethnic composition of the police, combined with recent incidents where Rotterdam officers were found to have exchanged racist and sexist WhatsApp will feed critical assessments of police inclusiveness, possibly also among LGBTQ+ communities in Rotterdam. In 2023, 41.8% of Rotterdammers who participated in a representative survey indicated that “police treat people unequally” - but in Amsterdam that percentage was similarly high with 47.4%.³ In the Netherlands, unequal treatment in relation to migration background is currently more widely debated than unequal treatment in relation to gender, sexual orientation and other relevant dimensions (e.g. class). The Dutch police nonetheless aims to address diversity in an intersectional manner, for example via its Police for everybody (*Politie voor iedereen*) program, which seeks to promote safe and inclusive teams, diversify the inflow of new officers, combat different forms of profiling and discrimination, and promote a “Network of Diverse Craftmanship” (*Netwerk Divers Vakmanschap*).⁴

Methodology

Data

For this research, two rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted with, in total, 13 self-identified LGBTQ+ people in Rotterdam (See [Table 1](#): Overview of participants). The participants ranged from 21 to 38 years old.

Table 1. Overview of participants.

Participant	Pronouns	Age Group	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Highest level of Education	Type of Contact with Police
1	She/Her	18–21	Cis woman	Bisexual	Bachelors	Vicarious Interactions
2	He/Him/All	18–21	Prefers to Self-Describe	Gay	Bachelors	Vicarious Interactions
3	She/Her	21–24	Transgender	Asexual, Pansexual, Bisexual	High School	Direct Contact
4	She/Her	21–24	Cis Woman	Bisexual/ Pansexual	Bachelors	Vicarious Interactions
5	They/Them	21–24	Non-Binary	Queer	Masters	Direct Contact
6	She/Her	21–24	Cis Woman	Femme Lesbian	High School	Direct Contact
7	He/Him	21–24	Cis Man	Gay	Bachelors	Vicarious Interactions
8	He/They	21–24	Queer	Queer	High School	Vicarious Interactions
9	She/Her	31–38	Cis Woman	Lesbian	Masters	Vicarious Interactions
10	He/Him	34–37	Cis Man	Gay	Allocation for Employment	Vicarious Interactions
11	He/Him	38–41	Cis Man	Gay	Bachelors	Professional and Direct Contact
12	They/Them	18–21	Non-Binary	Bisexual	High School	Vicarious Interactions
13	She/Her	31–34	Queer	Queer/Bisexual	Masters	Vicarious Interactions and Direct Contact

Older LGBTQ+ were especially hard to reach through snowball sampling as most participants who attended queer community events were younger and knew few older LGBTQ+ people. Semi-structured interviews allow us to control the line of questioning and guide the research more effectively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Such interviews also give participants room to self-explain their identity and ensure they felt safe and respected. The interviews were conducted in English, so only English-speaking people could be recruited. However, English is a widely spoken language in the Netherlands, and 10 out of 13 participants were long-term residents in Rotterdam. Three participants were non-Dutch European citizens (i.e., citizens of other EU Member States), such as international students, who had lived in Rotterdam for less than 2 years. Such participants may have been temporary residents who return to their country of nationality after some time, or relocate to another EU Member State (in principle, EU citizens have the right to live in all EU Member States). The interviews were conducted in March 2023 with a second round of interviews in November 2023.

By focusing on the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community, this study deliberately chose a careful selection of participants, which is meant to make the research objectives apparent rather than representative by exhibiting “new kinds of empirical materials that effectively exhibit the structure and workings of the phenomena to be understood” (Merton, 1987, p. 11). Thus, this study calls attention to the complexities and intersectionality of LGBTQ+ perspectives by focusing on the diversity within the community.

Targeted sampling was used by searching for specific target populations of LGBTQ+ people in Rotterdam, namely by attending queer-specific events and asking the people there if they wanted to be interviewed. Given known differential levels of trust in the police among transgender, lesbian, bisexual, and black women (Dario et al., 2020; Hodge & Sexton, 2020; Serpe & Nadal, 2017) there was a need to include diverse identities within the sample, which would also include the more marginalized and invisible sub-communities. Furthermore, in line with studies showing how gender nonconforming and non-binary people often face unique challenges due to their gender expression, which may also result in to more negative perceptions of the police (Serpe & Nadal, 2017), we also tried to sample specific gender identities such as non-binary and gender non-conforming people. Finally, we aimed to also include some respondents with a migration background. By including a diverse set of identities which might have different experiences and perceptions around the police, this study thus aims to explore a broader range of perceptions. Targeted sampling was then mixed with snowball sampling, asking participants if they knew someone who would like to be interviewed.

Using specific community meeting places has been proven helpful in collecting LGBTQ±specific data, as it attracts a diversified yet common

community into the same place (Gillespie, 2008). These queer-specific events include support groups, community events, and student organizations.

The three guiding sub-questions of the research, based on the literature review, helped to inform the topics for the interview guide. Firstly, we asked, how do LGBTQ+ perceive the police in terms of heteronormativity, and how does it impact LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police? Second, how do LGBTQ+ perceive the police in terms of homonationalism, and how does it impact LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police? And lastly, how do LGBTQ+ people perceive the police in terms of support and inclusion, specifically in relation to LGBTQ+ inclusive initiatives, and how does it impact LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police? (See [Appendix](#)). The topics derived from the sub-questions also included procedural justice elements, for example, participants were asked if they viewed police efforts of inclusion as trustworthy and if they thought the police treated LGBTQ+ with the same respect as straight and cis-gendered people.

Most (8 out of 13) participants only had vicarious experiences with the police, meaning that they only had indirect contact with the police and formed their opinions through the experiences of others with the police. Considering that LGBTQ+ people in Rotterdam shared sentiments of feeling invisible and more vulnerable (Van der Tuin et al., 2019), especially when it concerns reaching out to the police, it is plausible that such feelings might deter LGBTQ+ people from contacting the police and thus diminish their levels of (self-initiated) direct contact. Nonetheless, vicarious community experiences have also been demonstrated to be a vital predictor of police perceptions, namely in their ability “to amplify or validate individuals’ interpretations of personal experiences” (Brunson, 2007, p. 74) regarding the police. Rosenbaum et al. (2005) even demonstrate that vicarious community experiences often have a higher impact on police perceptions than direct experiences, highlighting how minorities frequently inform themselves on the police through media, friends, and their community.

All interviews were audio recorded and the data was stored on a secure digital drive for five months and then deleted. Formal consent for data storage and recording was asked verbally. A redacted and password-protected form of the transcripts was used for analysis.

Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is heavily involved in a sustained experience with the study participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Consequently, it becomes vital to reflect on our own positionality. The first author, who carried out the fieldwork, has had many years of contact with queer community organizations in several countries. He has assumed numerous roles in the presidency, as a volunteer, or even as a researcher in queer organizations. He

sees his prolonged contact and knowledge of the LGBTQ+ community—including in Rotterdam for about two years—as a positive characteristic that helped him to approach this group respectfully and easily. He knows some participants personally, and others more indirectly, which often led to participants feeling safer, speaking more openly and revealing deeper insights. However, the contacts of the first author with LGBTQ+ groups has often been focused on socially active and younger LGBTQ+ people, thus creating a bias toward these groups.

The first author's own opinion of the Dutch police has been shaped by his social circles and experiences. Before conducting this study, he was puzzled by the paradox that the police in the Netherlands were supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, especially in cities like Amsterdam where they participate in pride parades, while community perceptions of the police in Rotterdam seemed to be more negative among gender diverse and queer people he got to know in Rotterdam. The BLM movements also led many people, including himself, to become more critical of the police and police-community relations. The second author is a native-born Dutch national who has no involvement in LGBTQ+ organizations, yet has ample experience in studying institutional trust in the Netherlands, which includes research on police-community relations. Arguably, the positionality of each author as a relative insider in some respects, while also being a relative outsider in other respects helped them to get sufficiently “involved” with the research setting while also helping them to “distance” themselves from the empirical observations, by standing back and interpreting the findings from a theoretical angle (cf. Rojek, 2014).

Analytical strategy

An inductive method of data analysis, where the themes of the research emerge as they are analyzed, was combined with a more deductive method where theoretically informed sensitizing concepts also inform the coding process in Atlas.ti. Initial coding and line-by-line coding were first used to label and compare the data while remaining focused on the meaning this data provided (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). During the line-by-line coding process, each line or segment of the text was coded to ascribe meaning, themes, and patterns to data. Initial coding was followed by focused coding, in which the mentioned key concepts and themes were used to facilitate a more in-depth and theoretical understanding of the data. Some codes that emerged inductively from the data and that were not predefined were “visible queerness,” institutions, aggressiveness, microaggression, and homonormativity. In the context of this study, people who wore different clothing, and make-up, who were not fully passing, and generally stood in defiance to heteronormative assumptions around gender expression were considered visibly queer. The term emerged because several participants explained their personal and

vicarious experiences by highlighting how police, and the wider society, use such “visible cues” to construct social deviance and “out-of-placeness” (cf. Cook & Whowell, 2011).

Some of these themes could be combined with the preexisting sensitizing concepts. For example, aggressiveness, a code that emerged inductively, was grouped with heteronormativity, since it represents an aspect of hegemonic masculinity. This underlines how codes were gathered inductively, yet often within an overarching placement with the sensitizing concepts, thus rooting the data in theoretical explanations but remaining open to new and unexpected findings. While most sensitized concepts remained close to their elaboration in the theoretical framework, homonationalism was further refined into performativity, intersectionality, and homonormativity.

In the context of using a Strategic Research Method to make the research objective apparent rather than representative (Merton, 1987), it is valuable to achieve theoretical saturation when gathering new data no longer provided new insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, theoretical saturation provides rich and thick data that acknowledges the density of the research. With a sample size of 13, this study cannot claim full saturation, especially given the difficulties in recruiting older participants, whose experience as the first pioneers of the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement, might have given the study a more longitudinal perspective.

LGBTQ+ people remain a hard-to-access demographic, which even with the relative integration of the first author in the community represented a challenge in terms of recruiting participants, especially in a city like Rotterdam where LGBTQ+ people feel more invisible and vulnerable compared to Amsterdam. Nonetheless, the gathered data can be considered informationally representative in that data are likely to have been obtained from persons “who can stand for other persons with similar characteristics” (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 181). Especially given the fact that LGBTQ+ people and the specific LGBTQ+ sub-groups have direct and intimate information on the phenomenon that is being explored, but also that they possess similar characteristics to others in this sub-community and, in part, base themselves on vicarious experiences, makes them valuable proxies to understand larger community perceptions. Therefore, in terms of making the research problem apparent rather than representative and given that no new key insight seemed to emerge among those that the first researcher was able to recruit, a sample size of 13 was deemed sufficient within the available time constraints. Regarding validity, credibility was ensured by providing detailed descriptions of the data and clear explanations of how the data was analyzed and collected (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Reliability was ensured by including the step-by-step guides taken

during the research, such as documenting the coding procedures and the process of decision-making during the research.

Ethical procedures

The following research was approved by the DPAS Research Ethics Review Committee of the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, the reference number of the decision is ETH2324–0339. In accordance and consultation with the DPAS Privacy Officer and the Data Steward, full anonymity was ensured for the participants and their data. To achieve this anonymity age ranges were used and any details that could identify participants were redacted. Participants were guided through an informed consent form and gave their consent verbally, this consent was documented in the transcripts. Given the need for participant comfort and the sensibility of the data, verbal consent was determined to be the most appropriate way of asking for consent. Participants were informed of data storage and duration, and their explicit consent was requested. Furthermore, participants were told they could withdraw from the study at any point, even after the interviews were conducted, and without having to specify a reason.

Results

The results of this study are reported in relation to three main themes, which help answer the three sub-questions of this research mentioned in the previous section: heteronormativity, homonationalism, and LGBTQ+ liaison units. We elaborate on these themes in what follows.

Heteronormativity: Masculinity and gender norms

A prevailing perception among participants was that police officers tend to portray themselves as “masculine.” For instance, when thinking about the police, respondent 5 articulated,

I have to think of masculinity, like a very toxic sense of the word,

highlighting a pervasive association between police, masculinity, and toxicity. Respondent 9 similarly described the police as a masculine institution because officers allegedly like to show that they have “a right to use violence.” When asked to elaborate on her views, she further stated:

[. . .] I think its total bullshit that you have to be brave, you have to fight and you have to be the hero as the police are. These words are way too often only connected to men and masculinity.

Participant 7 similarly viewed the police as a problematic masculine institution:

the police always have to translate this dominance thing, so you have to be masculine.

These perceptions of the police as embodying stereotypical notions of masculinity were found to also influence overall attitudes toward the police. For example, Respondent 2 linked these perceived characteristics of the police to a lack of inclusivity, expressing,

The environment of the police as an institution is just very based on traditional gender roles and sexuality. So, I think it's not very inclusive, I don't feel like the police do anything to integrate queer people or to make queer people feel welcome

Other participants shared this sentiment. For example, participant 8, who identifies as queer, stated how they felt distanced by the police, and that their “masculine performance” makes the participant avoid the police altogether, e.g., as a victim or witness of crime:

I mean, again, from the whole masculine kind of thing, as a queer person, I've never felt fully included in that environment. So, I tend to avoid the police altogether. Because the very masculine environments of the police don't appeal to me. So I just, wouldn't feel welcomed altogether.

Some participants, such as participant 10, a gay cisgender man, similarly viewed the police as a masculine institution, but viewed it more positively as an inevitable characteristic of the police to supposedly function well. While such views point to diversity in how LGBTQ+ people perceived masculinity within the police, it should be emphasized that the latter viewpoint was an exception rather than the norm among the participants.

Most participants did not only criticize the police for being an overly masculine institution but also saw the police as reinforcing established gender norms and gender binaries. Participant 1, for example, stated:

It goes back to the fact that the police in general as an institution, I feel it's more like based on these binaries of gender. So, like male/female and really heteronormative in a sense.

Most participants also believed there is still a lack of dialog within the police concerning the role and importance of gender norms:

I think that for police, traditional gender roles and norms are not talked about. [...] I think it's just something that is absent in their field of work or as an institution, no one talks about sexuality and gender when you think about police. (Participant 2).

Several participants also highlighted that the Rotterdam police fail to accommodate LGBTQ+ perspectives in their view by not engaging in dialog. Namely, participants expressed a desire to be heard and for the perspectives to be

included in meaningful dialog, a vital predictor toward trust according to the procedural justice theory.

Participant 7 for example, explained that:

It's easier for them to understand straight relationships or like straight culture because most of the policemen in this society are straight.

Participant 3 added:

The police should go there with an understanding of queer culture and, from that point of view, investigate what is happening. Instead of going there with the mindset that that person is a pervert or a rapist [...] You can't really be more inclusive if you don't understand what you are trying to include.

The perceived lack of interest among police to engage in reflection on gender norms and engage in dialogue with the LGBTQ+ community was seen as reinforcing a lack of understanding of LGBTQ+ culture, which in turn, negatively affected participants' trust in the police.

Participants with diverse gender expressions in particular explained how a lack of understanding among police diminished trust by impeding respectful treatment. Referring to the pillars of procedural justice, it becomes apparent that especially gender-diverse participants felt misunderstood and excluded from dialog, which in turn also led to the perception that the police would have a more biased decision-making process toward this group. This was mainly demonstrated by participants' need to explain their perspectives and identities to the police, and thus be included in meaningful dialog. To exemplify, one non-binary participant, when referring to their own non-binary identity, explained that there is a lack of knowledge on non-binary and genderqueer individuals among police, and also explained how other institutional arrangements, such as ID regulations, can impede respectful treatment by the police:

Non-binary gender identity is not fairly respected in general, so it's difficult to be respected, like in most spaces, and when it comes to police there is no exception for that (.) I think that they have more disrespect for non-binary gender identity, or maybe us in general, like trans identity, especially because they're so bound to laws and regulations [that simplify gender and sexuality]. And when it comes to that, they would probably just look at my ID card or something and be like, this is your gender. (Participant 5)

Some participants indeed experienced negative encounters with the police in relation to identity checks based on ID cards. They expressed feeling left out of dialog, feeling unrepresented, feeling like they are respected less, and treated with less dignity, all vital pillars of perceived procedural justice, in determining trust in police. For example, participant 3, a transgender woman, recounts an experience at a nightclub in Rotterdam where the police were distrustful of the stated gender on her identity card. She was currently transitioning, and the police questioned her gender expression, assuming her ID to be fake. She

recounted that the police questioned her gender quite aggressively while not including her in any meaningful dialog, giving rise to a feeling that the police see gender norms through very traditional and restrictive lenses. This interaction significantly impacted how the participant perceives the police, as she feels that her identity was disrespected and treated without dignity. This specific participant felt that there was a lack of respect from the police toward her gender identity and that she was not given the opportunity to express her identity properly. This lack of respect—highlighted by the third pillar of procedural justice—was mainly evidenced by the aggressive nature of the police toward her gender identity, but also by excluding her from constructive or valuable dialog.

At the same time, it could be observed that not all participants shared this sentiment. Participant 11 held a more positive perception of the police, mainly due to the positive interactions he had with the police in regard to his sexual identity. When he identified himself as a gay man to the police, participant 11 felt that his identity was respected and understood, leading also to the perception of more neutral decision-making by the police. In terms of procedural justice, by perceiving the police to be trustworthy, respectful, and neutral in decision making participant 11 perceived an increase in trust in the police. The participant's story shows that the police can also be respectful, especially when dealing with gay men, a sub-community within the LGBTQ+ spectrum that has become relatively well-accepted in the Netherlands. However, it is important to underline that his experiences and perceptions were an exception within this study.

Homonationalism and diversity

While the Netherlands is internationally recognized for its visibility of LGBTQ+ identities, participants criticized police inclusivity efforts as being superficial. Criticism was particularly directed at the police's involvement in pride events, with participants labeling these efforts as “performative.” Participant 1, when referring to the police in the Netherlands, stated:

I'm aware of the fact that the Netherlands might be perceived as being super inclusive and super diverse. but at the same time, it's not. So I think it's more almost like a facade. So, claiming to be really diverse but actually not being so diverse.

Such views echo concerns in the literature on homonationalism that conservative groups make superficial and insincere claims about being tolerant toward LGBTQ+ identities as a way to mark the distinction with “non-western cultures,” especially with Islamic minorities, and maintain ethnic status hierarchies. When asked if she perceived the police to treat specific sub-communities with a different level of respect, participant 13 states that gay white men are often more respected by the police

especially when compared to LGBTQ+ people from different ethnic backgrounds:

If you are the right person, if you are white, or if you are rich looking you get more respect [...] Dutch police is not exempt from like stereotyping certain groups of people into criminals and, and bothering them more just because where they are from, like looking like a young Dutch Moroccan boy

As theorized under the fourth pillar of procedural justice, which highlights the importance of trustworthy motives, such perceptions of police performativity had a profound negative impact on trust. Respondent 2 expressed skepticism, stating, “*It does not feel genuine,*” leading to a reluctance to engage with the police. Namely, participants noted a disconnect between diversity claims by the Dutch police, and the inclusiveness that they observed and heard of during encounters with the police itself, leading to feelings that the diversity claims are not genuine, or are at least not widely embraced. Some participants described such insincerity in advocacy as “pinkwashing,” the process by which institutions claim diversity to further their public image without addressing issues around intersectional change and institutional discrimination, such as the problematic identity checks. In this respect, it was interesting to note that participants seemed to experience differential treatment by the police based on differences in “visible queerness,” with the police displaying greater respect for those not visibly expressing their LGBTQ+ identity. Participant number 7, when asked why he perceives the police to differentially respect different LGBTQ+ subgroups, explained:

Explicit. Yeah, I mean, I’m not wearing any makeup or, if a policeman sees me, he’s not going to doubt my sexual orientation. But if you see a guy with earrings, an eyeliner or like a wig, a oh (worried look) something may happen there.

Participant 4 similarly claimed that the police displayed more respect and dignity for LGBTQ+ people who do not visibly demonstrate their sexuality and gender expression and can pass as “straight,” in contrast to more visibly queer individuals.

I don’t think they treat gender fluid or genderqueer people with the same dignity they would if they were binary. (Participant 4)

In this respect, participant 5, who identifies with the non-binary label, recalled a specific interaction with the police:

I have to think of one incident when I was just like walking around enjoying myself, and they stopped me and they were like, Oh, you look confused. Can we have your ID please? I was like, Really? I was just walking around, that doesn’t make me a confused person. But also, do you think I was quite outstanding in the crowd because I did have an unusual outfit maybe compared to everybody else? Okay. So I think it’s, I don’t draw attention to me, like on purpose, but I do think that it makes them more alert, of me or something.

This specific participant felt that their “visible” gender expression was not understood and respected by the police, leading to them having a more negative perception of the police in how they interact with non-binary individuals. Even LGBTQ+ people who do not identify with a genderqueer label have stated that they perceive the police to treat gender-diverse people with less respect, namely by informing themselves through vicarious community experiences (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). The differential treatment of different subgroups in the LGBTQ+ community based on “visible queerness” confirms the concerns that there are clear limits to the tolerance of sexual minorities among Dutch police, which align with concerns about homonationalism in the Netherlands, and a persistent tendency toward heteronormativity.

Support and inclusion: The role of PinkinBlue

While many participants held critical or negative views of the police, it is important to underline how LGBTQ+ liaison units within the police, like the PinkinBlue, influenced LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police in Rotterdam. All participants held somewhat positive perspectives on the PinkinBlue initiative, yet most participants were unaware that the unit exists. Only Participants 9, 10, 11, and 13, long-term residents of Rotterdam, had extensive knowledge of the PinkInBlue Unit, and felt positively represented by it. Participant 11, for example, stated that he feels a certain easiness to reaching out to the PinkinBlue unit in connection to his sexual identity:

I also know that the pink police force, for example, they handle sensitive cases. So you do feel represented by them.

Participants who were unaware of PinkinBlue received some information about it during the interview. They similarly felt that it increased LGBTQ+ representation within the police force, and expected that it positively impacted how LGBTQ+ perceive the police:

I think it would be a great idea because, if they have a department specifically run by LGBTQ people, they will be more aware of the topics that actually affect the community. So I will be way more approachable to seek help. (Participant 8)

Participant 7 added:

It's is nice, right? Because they might represent a little bit of us. You know, like, they're also to make us feel comfortable.

PinkinBlue appeared to promote trust in the police by improving participation and dialog (the “first pillar” of procedural justice), by enhancing respectful interpersonal treatment (the “third pillar”), and by enhancing perceived neutrality in decision-making (“second pillar”). Participant 3 stated, for example,

that they would have preferred the PinkinBlue unit to be present during their interaction with the police:

Well they are part of the queer community and more educated on the queer community, so I'm if they see a trans person that isn't fully passing, they will be more understanding of it and understand that a transition takes years. It would become a dialog from an understanding standpoint. I would probably be calmer myself and have a more normal dialog with the police to try to resolve the situation.

These positive perceptions of the PinkinBlue as more understanding of LGBTQ+ identities also increased the perceptions of the PinkinBlue as a more neutral decision-making force, by for example reducing the chance that they would question a trans person who is non passing for their gender identity.

While PinkinBlue was generally seen in a positive light, it is essential to state that most participants were unaware of the PinkinBlue unit, which therefore had a lesser impact on their overall perception of the police than the previously mentioned points:

I don't see the police force promoting the PinkInBlue. I don't see them on the streets, they are not visible to me. (Participant 3)

Nonetheless, the importance of LGBTQ+ liaison units, especially such unique ones as the PinkinBlue in the Netherlands, demonstrates that there are successful and effective policies that bridge police and LGBTQ+ community relations.

Discussion and conclusion

The present study analyses LGBTQ+ perspectives of the police in Rotterdam. Uncovering and addressing the causes of distrust among different subgroups under the LGBT+ umbrella has always warranted attention, but has become even more important societally in the light of recent increases in various countries in the number of people, especially younger people, who identify as non-binary or transgender.⁵ Such increases indicate an increased societal acceptance of LGBT+ identities in the countries involved, and it is important, through far from self-evident, that such social changes also resonate in public institutions.

By going beyond simplistic gender/sexual categories, we show how diverse identities within the LGBTQ+ community are associated with differential perceptions of—and experiences with—the police. By unpacking the heterogeneity within the LGBTQ+ community this study thus demonstrates that perceptions and experiences vary considerably, and can still be quite negative, which contrasts with the results of existing quantitative studies, which are bound to oversimplify LGBTQ+ identities (Huijnk et al., 2022; Jonas &

Feddes, 2020). While the Netherlands has some of the most progressive policies regarding LGBTQ+ protection in the world, most participants still see the Rotterdam police as a problematic heteronormative institution that tends to uphold traditional gender/sexual identities as the established norm, which is sanctioned both informally (e.g. by withholding respect) and formally (e.g. via the institution of “binary” ID regulations that do not allow people to use the X gender). At most, police officers tend to be selectively tolerant toward LGBTQ+ people, which leads some LGBTQ+ sub-groups, like gender-diverse people, to maintain quite negative perceptions of the police.

While the Dutch police have various initiatives to support LGBTQ+ people, most participants describe the tolerance and inclusivity of police officers as being insincere, mostly benefiting people who are not visible queer and can “pass” as straight/cisgender. While the participant’s stories point at various complex overarching themes, one common theme thus emerged as crucial: the vital importance of “visible queerness” in defining LGBTQ+ perspectives and experiences, and the resulting impact on their trust in the police. Participants who are visibly queer and/or often interact with visibly queer individuals were the most critical about the police. The participants who held entirely positive perspectives around the police did not identify as visibly queer and belonged to the most accepted sub-groups within the LGBTQ+ community, namely, gay and lesbian cisgender people. The more visibly queer people faced higher police scrutiny and often had more negative interactions with the police, due to their gender/sexual expression, and also experienced more difficulties to normalize their identities using IDs.

A procedural justice lens helps shed light on the limits to trust in police, as negative perceptions of citizen participation in dialogs, neutrality in decision-making, dignity/respect, and trustworthy motives (Mazerolle et al., 2013), legitimizes distrust in the police for LGBTQ+ participants. For example, the impression that the police have more respect for straight cisgender people than for other subgroups under the LGBTQ+ umbrella directly contributes to diminished trust, especially among the latter subgroups. Furthermore, the perceived lack of trustworthy motives of the police concerning LGBTQ+ issues similarly reinforced lower levels of trust in the police. For example, negative perceptions of the police were upheld even if the police showed initiative to integrate LGBTQ+ due to a perceived lack of trustworthiness and suspicions of performative inclusion. Namely, participants noted a disconnect between diversity claimed by the Dutch police, and the inclusiveness that they observed and heard of during encounters with the police itself, leading to feelings that the diversity claims are not genuine, or are at least not widely embraced.

The results underline how the broader institutional landscape in which police operate (e.g. existing ID regulations) codetermines patterns of differential trust. Heteronormativity, for example, encapsulates various institutional dimensions (Berlant & Warner, 1998), and we indeed find that low trust in the

police partially resulted from institutional intersections, such as when police conducted aggressive ID regulation checks on trans participants or questioned non-binary participants for looking “confused.” Such problematic practices are partially enabled by the institutional burdens in relation to changing one’s gender on official documents or using a non-binary identity.

While previous studies demonstrate that the most accepted LGBTQ+ subgroups tend to have high levels of trust in the Dutch police (Huijnk et al., 2022; Jonas & Feddes, 2020), academics and policymakers should thus continue to be aware that describing the LGBTQ+ community as a unified and monolithic group leads to overgeneralizations, which do not accurately portray LGBTQ+ experiences. Given that negative LGBTQ+ experiences with, and perceptions of, the police are still evident in the second-largest city of the Netherlands, it can be expected that distrust of the police certainly exists outside of the larger cities and in other countries, especially among “visible” LGBT+ groups with the least accepted sexual and gender identities (also see Dario et al., 2020; Dwyer, 2015, 2021; Shields, 2021).

The results thus indicate that we are still far from the ideal of inclusive policing, where all groups in society feel that the police protect and represent them. To obtain this ideal it is crucial that awareness of the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community is enhanced among police, but also in the society at large. Learning what different identities entail, and how cultural identity markers and pronouns can be used correctly, will reduce mistreatment, will increase how well-understood and respected people with LGBTQ+ identities feel, and will ultimately promote institutional trust.

It is recommendable for advocacy work and future research to collect and study good practices from various countries, both the PinkinBlue and Police for everybody initiatives in the Netherlands, but also initiatives such as the LGBTQ+ Police Network in the UK, which have created a detailed intersectional manual for the training of police, including LGBTQ+ liaison units (Pakouta & Forsyth, 2020). For example, it recommends that police officers be informed about LGBTQ+ news and cultural identity markers, educate themselves on the correct usage of pronouns, and that LGBTQ+ liaison units are present at nightclubs and other LGBTQ+ meeting places. The manual also provides various clarifications of LGBTQ+ issues, namely what the different identities entail, how to properly and respectfully search a trans person, and raising awareness that official gender identification might not match the gender presentation of a person. Regarding the last point, police officers are encouraged to know the process of changing one’s gender on official documents and to understand how to ask for someone’s gender identity respectfully. While the manual includes other useful recommendations, the police in the Netherlands and elsewhere could commission the development of similar guides in collaboration with local civil society organizations. Given that the negative experiences of participants, such as ID checks,

could have been avoided if the police had access to such a manual, highlights how important such measures can be, to both deescalate situations and toward increasing respect for the LGBTQ+ community. Given that none of the temporary residents of Rotterdam knew of the PinkinBlue, also highlights the importance of including such residents in such initiatives to ensure broader awareness across all residents.

Furthermore, recognizing that specific sub-groups like genderqueer or visibly queer people face unique challenges, like a lack of third-gender options on official documents or intense administrative burdens to legally change one's gender, does not only increase academic insight—it also highlights how more can be done to protect these sub-groups, even in countries like the Netherlands.

Future research should continue to focus on how specific sub-groups within the LGBTQ+ community perceive the police in different social and institutional contexts, also reaching out to groups that are unrepresented among the participants of the present study, such as older LGBTQ+ adults. Especially non-binary and LGBTQ+ people of color seem to have specific experiences with the police that warrant more attention to help ensure that various “nonstandard” identities, which do not represent a threat to public safety, are better accommodated and treated justly by our public institutions, without unnecessarily evoking distrust.

Notes

1. Source: <https://www.politie.nl/onderwerpen/roze-in-blauw.html> visited June 2024
2. Statistics Netherlands has recently dropped the western/non-western distinction because of its colonial connotations, but persons were classified as having a non-Western migration background if they had at least one born parent born outside of Europe (except Turkey), North America, Oceania, Japan and Indonesia. The term was widely used in publications, with limited data being available on other, less problematic categorizations (e.g. based on continent). The largest “non-Western” groups in Rotterdam, and also in the Netherlands at large, originate from Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and the Dutch Antilles, and about half of the population with a migration background is currently native-born (“second-generation immigrants”).
3. Source: <https://veiligheidsmonitor.databank.nl/>, visited June 2024.
4. For more information about the program see <https://www.politie.nl/informatie/politie-voor-iedereen-diversiteit-en-inclusie.html>, visited June 2024.
5. For example, according to Pew Research, 5.1% of adults under 30 identify as transgender or non-binary, against 1.6% among all adults in the US. See: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/06/07/about-5-of-young-adults-in-the-u-s-say-their-gender-is-different-from-their-sex-assigned-at-birth/><https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/06/23/5-key-findings-about-lgbtq-americans/>.

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Appendix

Guiding sub-questions:

How do LGBTQ+ perceive the police in terms of heteronormativity, and how does it impact LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police?

How do LGBTQ+ perceive the police in terms of homonationalism, and how does it impact LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police?

How do LGBTQ+ people perceive the police in terms of support and inclusion, specifically in relation to LGBTQ+ inclusive initiatives, and how does it impact LGBTQ+ perceptions of the police? The topics derived from the sub-questions also included procedural justice elements, for example, participants were asked if they viewed police efforts of inclusion as trustworthy and if they thought the police treated LGBTQ+ with the same respect as straight and cis-gendered people.