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**Paper proposal for 'Nexus: Newsletter of the Australian Sociological Association'  
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**Policing embodied queerness: focusing on bodies in criminological research**

In this paper, I take up a precarious position: I am suggesting that it may be useful to explore how embodying queerness in public space may lead to certain types of policing practices. This position is precarious for two reasons. Firstly, it is challenging because it suggests that there may be certain ways of looking queer or 'reading' a body as a queer body, an idea that has been discouraged by academic commentators. Secondly, it flies in the face of the notion that policing is somehow impartial by suggesting that more could be done for queer communities. These issues are examined below concluding with a call for more embodied research on these issues.

The relationship between the police and queer (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, queer, questioning) communities has long been a topic of concern in criminological research. This concern emerges out of a tense history evidenced by both over-policing practices (such as the 1994 police raid of the Tasty Nightclub in Melbourne) and under-policing practices, where assistance is sought but the response is minimal. This tension is multiplied by the fairly recent decriminalisation of homosexual intercourse in the Criminal Code, and the policing of queer leisure spaces. As such, researchers have sought to know more about this relationship by examining queer people's experiences with police, and the experiences of queer people working in the police. Many have focused on police attitudes towards queer communities as well as the attitudes that queer communities have of police. Some researchers have even investigated how criminal justice undergraduate students think about queer communities in order to gauge the impact of these attitudes when they go into policing work. Much of this research focuses on gauging these issues either statistically or by gathering qualitative accounts of police-queer community interactions.

What is most interesting about these approaches is that they overlook the role of the body in police-queer community relationships. Even though a good proportion of police work involves policing bodies, the body appears to have been marginalised as a mediator of these interactions. This it seems has happened despite the work of academics like Stephen Tomsen (2001), which highlights the importance of gender non-conformity in the role of hate crimes for example. Tomsen and Mason (2001) make an important link between the construction of masculinity and the different forms of homophobic violence engaged in by men and young boys. Complementing this contention is a large body of literature which demonstrates the importance of the body for the construction of masculinity in contemporary Western culture. The body is so important in the lives of young boys that it is quite literally the currency that boys exchange in their constructions of a masculine identity: they do certain types of work on and with the body to achieve proper masculinity (Nayak & Kehily 1996). Yet the body seems to be mostly sidelined not only in the broader literature exploring people's relationships with criminal justice processes but also in literature about policing relationships.

This applies especially to discussions of queer bodies in criminological contexts. Although the research is limited, the main interests in research about queer people's experiences of criminal justice processes is their mental health, their legal and human rights, and their treatment by criminal justice workers, policies, and law enforcement officers. Any concerted discussion about the 'matter' (Butler 1993) of the queer body appears to be the domain of queer theorists rather than sociologists or criminologists. Focusing our attention on queer bodies in social research has come to be situated as a risky practice, particularly for those 'straight-identifying' researchers. One always risks stereotyping and constructing these bodies as 'camp', 'effeminate' or 'butch'. As 'good' sociological and criminological researchers, we are taught to challenge the notion that there are certain physical characteristics that may be associated with any homogenous group of people. There is so much academic discussion about how we need to challenge stereotypes of queerness that suggesting that there is any specific way that a person may look queer emerges as disruptive. Thus, to propose that we should focus our attentions on the visible queerness of bodies to learn more about policing practices certainly seems inappropriate.

The irony of this is that, despite the apparent lack of available queer role models, people learn about what it means to look like a queer person in the media, and they learn how to use this stereotyped knowledge to 'read' the bodies of others in public and private spaces. Just as we become adept at making judgements about someone's class status by examining their physical appearance, so too do they learn how to detect queer physicality. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the case of young members of the queer community. Young people almost voraciously assess the bodies of their peers for any miniscule indication that they may be breaching the boundaries of normalised gender. Young males in particular fiercely police how other young men do gender and whether or not they are doing it properly (Sharpe 2002). This happens on such a widespread basis that even straight-identifying young people can and will be harassed and subject to violence for breaching these norms and visibly embodying queerness.

It is my argument that these types of learning may inform policing practices with queer communities. I am suggesting that because police work is about policing bodies, it may also be about reading and interpreting bodies through certain understandings of sexuality and gender. Assessing bodies as queer bodies was undoubtedly somehow involved in policing work in historical contexts, as the laws criminalising homosexual activity could not have been applied to queer communities without some understanding of what a queer body looks like. Pratt and Tuffin (1996) indicate that police in New Zealand draw on discourses of effeminism in their constructions of homosexual behaviour. What we don't yet know is the degree to which these ideas inform police interactions with the queer community.

It is important to note at this point what I am not suggesting. I am not suggesting that we launch into a neo-Lombrosian project and attempt to link queer bodies biologically with criminality. Rather, I am interested in the ways that we might learn from considering how police and other criminal justice workers read certain bodies as queer for better and worse. I am also not suggesting that this body reading is necessarily counterproductive for police relationships with queer communities. In contrast, I am interested in what information it may offer up that we don't yet know about this relationship.

I would suggest that this is particularly a crucial area of concern for queer young people. The various subcultures that young people are affiliated with make them highly visible, as the body is made and re-made as a key indicator of these affiliations. These bodily practices are usually displayed in public space, the key area in which interactions between police and young people are forged.

Further complicating the situation of queer young people are their life circumstances which can more often than not see them spending significant amounts of time in public space. Queer young people experience multifarious forms of verbal, emotional, physical and sexual victimisation at the hands of their friends, school peers as well as the general public. They are therefore more likely than their heterosexual companions to have been at one point homeless or 'sleeping rough', to have been involved in the use or dealing of drugs, or to have been involved in 'survival sex'. All of these factors can reasonably make the young queer person the focus of police attention and intervention. They are marked not only as bodies in need of treatment and welfare but also as law and order problems in need of proper regulation.

With young queer bodies being 'marked' in these ways, it seems appropriate to move into a focus on how bodies are constructed as queer for good and bad in policing practices. There is little doubt that these bodies are in some ways more visible than others, particularly in the case of the highly visible, hypermasculine bodies being constructed in gay culture (Ridge, Plummer & Peasley 2006). Researchers now need to work with rather than against the constructions of these bodies to enable new ways of thinking about policing and criminal justice processes.

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