Valuing different shades of blue
From diversity to inclusion and the challenge of harnessing difference

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this paper is to examine Australian efforts to promote gender equality in policing, suggesting that future police leaders will be confronted with the challenge of ensuring that their organisations are not only demographically diverse, but more importantly, that they are inclusive.

Design/methodology/approach - The paper utilises current Australian efforts to promote gender equality (case study), as a means of examining the way in which the conceptual distinction between diversity and inclusion plays out in practice.

Findings - The paper finds that current efforts to promote gender equality are being used as a proxy for diversity more broadly and are overly focussed upon demographic diversity. Less attention is being paid to the development of inclusive work environments, which will present a challenge to future leaders who are required to manage more heterogenous workforces.

Research limitations/implications - Research into the efficacy of existing strategies, which will further theoretical debate, is proposed, with a call for research by those from a wider range of disciplines, in addition to psychology and management studies, being made.

Practical implications - It is recommended that policing organisations utilise language focussed upon inclusion rather than diversity and foster cultures of learning, beginning at the academy.

Originality/value - The paper contributes to the global debate on workforce diversity by drawing on a Southern Hemisphere perspective on contemporary efforts in policing. This complements extant studies on diversity which emanate primarily from the UK and USA, and provides an important reflection for police organisations across the world as they proceed with good intentions around creating much needed cultures of difference in thinking and operating.

Keywords - Learning organization, Diversity, Organizational culture, Police leadership, Organizational reform, Women in policing

Paper type - Conceptual paper
Introduction

A multitude of challenges face the contemporary police organisation and its leaders, all of which are likely to increase in the future. Unlike their historical predecessors, today’s police chiefs – be they in the developed or developing world – are required to navigate an increasingly sophisticated law enforcement environment, characterised by rapidly changing technology and global criminal alliances. Organisations must work co-operatively with a wide range of stakeholders and must be open to harnessing the expertise of both internal and external resources in order to keep abreast (or indeed ahead) of contemporary public safety challenges. Communities are demanding a new type of police force. Gone are the days of the “thin blue line”. Today’s heterogeneous communities demand a voice, consultation and legitimacy from and of their police services. Automatic deference to power is on the wane in liberal western democracies, such that even those equipped with official appointments and uniforms, find themselves unable to rely on the command and control certainty of the past to get the job done.

As a result, police and other emergency services organisations need to reimagine ways of thinking and doing. They need to draw on diverse skills, cultivate an open mindset and engage innovative leaders to navigate this complex world. This need has intersected with a push across police organisations for valuing demographic diversity, particularly in terms of gender and ethnicity. Increasing the numbers of women, and black and minority ethnic groups, within the police force is thought to lend credence to the oft-heard Peelian mantra of representativeness: the “police are the public and the public are the police”. And it is also thought to assist an organisation by bringing different ways of thinking, borne of the varied life-experiences women and people of colour have.

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Accepting the business case for change, western policing organisations around the world are actively pursuing the diversity agenda, largely through a focus on the targeted recruitment of specific groups and the removal of structural barriers to their organisational progression, with major efforts being undertaken in the UK (Dick and Cassell, 2002; Loftus, 2003; Silvestri, 2003), the USA (United States Department of Justice and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016), Canada (Workman-Stark, 2017) and in the Southern Hemisphere nations of Australia and New Zealand (Elizabet Broderick & Co, 2016; Equal Opportunity Commission of South Australia (EOC SA), 2016; Prenzler et al., 2010; YEHREOC, 2015). In less developed nations, increasing women’s participation in policing is a significant component of police reform efforts in Africa, the Pacific and the Middle East.

Globally, the future police organisation is therefore likely to be less male and less white. In vociferously making the case for change, business and organisational (including policing and emergency services), leaders have overwhelmingly focussed upon the positive outcomes of diverse workforces. Whilst this is necessary for the purpose of garnering support for change, it presents a risk that a lack of attention will be shown to the well-documented challenges presented by diversity, such as decreased personal trust, increased interpersonal conflict and exacerbated status differentiation – all of which decrease rather than increase performance, unless strategically mitigated (Otten and Jansen, 2015). To this end, we suggest that while, globally, policing and emergency services are immediately focussed upon increasing demographic diversity, the challenge of the future will be leveraging that diversity and nurturing psychological safety in diverse workforces.

In this paper, we explore these interwoven threads: the quest for diverse ways of operating, and the push for demographic diversity, with specific reference to contemporary Australian efforts to promote diversity (particularly on the basis of gender) in policing.

We argue that attempts to shift the demographic make-up of organisations to be more reflective of the communities they serve are laudable, but are only part of the solution to operating differently. Looking ahead, to a time where policing organisations are less homogenous, leveraging difference will be key; thus, we use this paper to remind police organisations and their leaders that it is a culture of inclusion, not just diversity, that will ultimately change the face of policing.

In exploring these issues, we acknowledge the plethora of ways in which the terms diversity and inclusion are defined and employed, often inter-changeably. For the purposes of this paper, we treat the terms diversity and inclusion as conceptually distinct (Jonsen et al., 2011; Roberson, 2006; Workman-Stark, 2017), a distinction we believe will assist the refinement of efforts to harness the benefits of diversity for the good of Australian policing.
To this end, following Roberson (2006, p. 217), we premise our discussion upon the notion that “[...] diversity focusses on organizational demography, whereas inclusion focusses on the removal of obstacles to the full participation and contribution of employees in organizations”.

The global context: why diversity?

Like most organisations, both government and corporate, the majority of contemporary policing organisations recognise the benefits of – and are striving for – increased diversity. This pursuit is typically framed in terms of three key arguments. First, in keeping with democratic values, the ideal police service should be representative of society, theoretically enabling it to cultivate the neutrality required to engage fairly with communities.

Second, equal participation is a basic human right – it is a moral imperative from which good will flow (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Third, and of far greatest contemporary rhetorical focus, is the notion that diversity leads to improved performance, in military and policing circles framed as “improved operational effectiveness” (Elizabeth Broderick & Co, 2016).

The benefits of diverse organisations are widely touted by government and the private sector alike. In broad terms, diverse teams are said to promote creativity and innovation, on account of the fact that those with different backgrounds bring different experiences and ways of thinking to the table. Diversity helps mitigate the limitations of “group think”, which is particularly evident in closed systems such as policing organisations, where single-route entry is the norm, and the career pipeline is collectively navigated by close-knit groups over long periods of time. Drawing largely upon research into corporate performance, diverse organisations outperform homogenous ones in a plethora of ways. Diverse organisations are: more productive; better attract and retain talent; foster higher levels of employee satisfaction; and boast higher levels of public legitimacy (Davis et al., 2016; McCuiston et al., 2004).

Diversity is, then, understandably a desirable organisational characteristic. But it is important to ask “diversity of what?” Reflecting its historical antecedents in anti-discrimination legislation and the American Civil Rights Movement, most contemporary approaches to diversity promotion and management continue to be constructed around categories of person, with a particular focus upon visible attributes such as race and gender (and, to a growing extent, ability/disability and sexual identity), and significantly less attention to invisible differences, such as informational (e.g. work experience and educational background), value and psychological diversity (Jonsen et al., 2011). This focus – at the group rather than individual level – stems from efforts to promote equal opportunities “for all”, and has been contrasted by some scholars with “diversity management”, the emphasis of which is the individual (Jonsen et al., 2011, p. 39).

The most salient categories of historical employment disadvantage – namely, race and gender – continue to dominate both scholarship and practice, despite recognition that social identity is rarely constructed singularly. In the Australian context, a flurry of attention to women’s participation in leadership has occurred in recent years, contributing to ongoing debates about the essentialisation of women and the unresolved tension between feminists of difference and feminists of equality (Chan et al., 2010). Essentialist arguments have figured prominently in debates about the role of women in policing, the culture of which has long been constructed around a hyper-masculinist version of masculinity which, drawing upon the dominant “crime fighter” script, emphasises the physical requirement for brute strength over other necessary requirements of policing (Chan et al., 2010; Silvestri, 2003, Workman-Stark, 2015). Against this backdrop, physical competency assessments – a component of all police entry schemes – have long been recognised as a major barrier to women’s entry into policing, having recently been revised in many jurisdictions to better reflect the inherent requirements of the job (Prenzler, 1998; Silvestri, 2003). Yet, this alone has not mitigated the widespread view of many, both men and women, that women lack the physical strength and therefore do not embody the threat of dominance required to do the tough job of police on the front line.

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More positively, however, in recent times, growing appreciation that police work is more than the omnipresent threat of forced compliance has resulted in greater value being placed on ways of working that do not rely solely on brute force. This has coincided with the popularisation of a range of leadership styles – most notably, calls for greater transformational leadership – which have moved police and other organisations away from an otherwise paramilitary command and control ethos. The understanding that the “I say, you do” approach is only part of the police officer’s and police leader’s repertoire has allowed for a renewed focus upon the positive contributions that women can make to
policing by virtue of their different ways of working and interacting, rather than a focus on the deficits women have compared to men.

Although some contest the existence of marked differences in the leadership styles of men and women, others suggest that women lead in a markedly different way, being more inclusive and focussed upon recognition of others than their male colleagues (Rosener, 1990).

Within a policing context, women have also been found to be less frequently the subjects of public complaints, particularly those relating to the excessive use of force, and less likely to be the subjects of investigations into corruption allegations (Prenzler, 2002). Against this backdrop, while policing organisations continue to be “hostile” to women (Silvestri, 2003, p. 22), women have simultaneously become symbolic of the broader cultural change and professionalisation agendas.

**Australian efforts to promote diversity: is it really just about gender?**

Australia has been the scene of significant efforts in recent years to address concerns about police workforce diversity. This activity warrants further exploration as it provides a useful example of how good intentions around diversifying the police workforce can become unhelpfully attached to one characteristic – is this case, gender. Indeed, we suggest that contemporary reform efforts have ended up utilising “women” as a proxy for diversity writ large.

As in other nations, Australian anti-discrimination legislation provided the initial impetus for the diversity agenda, with subsequent efforts to not only prevent discrimination but encourage broad workforce participation being pursued through equal employment opportunity policy (Prenzler, 1998). However, as highlighted by Fleming and Lafferty (2003), concerted efforts to promote gender equality have largely been borne of crisis, with major reviews such as the Wood and Fitzgerald enquiries, suggesting that increased numbers of women would mitigate corruption. Herein perhaps lies the first hint of the danger of conflating gender equality with the broader push for diversity of thinking, with the increase of female personnel in some ways seen as a panacea for organisational inertia and outdated ways of operating. To ascribe any “group” with this ability is surely setting it up to fail.

Notwithstanding the “promise” that increased female participation in policing and in police leadership has been given, as elsewhere, progress towards gender equality in policing in Australia has been slow (Prenzler et al., 2010), the primary focus having been upon increasing women’s access to traditional policing gateways such as recruitment, training opportunities, promotion and deployment opportunities. This is consistent with the generic focus of equal opportunities policy, yet as noted by Silvestri (2003, p. 172): [...] [the] message remains one that allows women to compete effectively for existing jobs and one in which men are encouraged to accept that competition. By encouraging the notion that women can and are as capable as men, the police service appears to be moving towards an organisational logical characterised by gender neutrality in line with the notion of the abstract and disembodied worker. This concentration is at the expense of a critical examination of the job itself.

Despite a lack of systematic attention to culture and the way in which it might be changed, improvements for women in policing have been made. Whilst the poor quality of human resources data makes whole-of-nation statistics difficult to provide, in 2008, women constituted 26.62 per cent of sworn police personnel in Australia (Prenzler et al., 2010) and currently comprise around 25 per cent of the sworn workforce (Sarre and Prenzler, 2016).

Women now enjoy deployment into a wide range of operational areas and representation in the most senior ranks is increasing. In 2001, Christine Nixon was appointed as the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, being the first female Commissioner of an Australian police force; a number of police jurisdictions have recently appointed their first female deputy commissioners, and Queensland Fire and Rescue have also appointed their first female commissioner. The existence of the female police officer, however, continues to be a challenging one, as evidenced by a raft of recent reviews into gender equality in policing, which highlight the serious plight of women police officers, who confront sexual harassment and discrimination on a frequent basis. It is unclear whether this experience translates to other emergency service jurisdictions, although there is nothing to suggest that it does not.

“enabling all to bring their authentic selves to work […] may ultimately hasten progress”

The first of these reviews was commissioned by Victoria Police in 2015, followed by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) in August 2016 and South Australia Police in early 2017. Both the “Independent review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour, in Victoria Police”, undertaken by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VDOHRC) (2015), and the “Independent review into sex discrimination, sexual
harassment and predatory behaviour in South Australia Police”, undertaken by the EOC SA (2016), had a more specific remit than “Culture change: gender diversity and inclusion in the Australia Federal Police”, undertaken by the former Australian sex discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick (Elizabeth Broderick & Co, 2016). Yet, the findings of the three reviews were remarkably similar, each having found: systemic structural discrimination against women at all major career gateways; the absence of flexible work practices, which poses a particular challenge to working parents; rampant sexual harassment and predatory behaviour; and hyper-masculine cultures that are generally hostile towards women (Elizabeth Broderick & Co, 2016; EOC SA, 2016; VEOHRC, 2015).

In response to review findings, each of the jurisdictions has implemented a raft of recommendations, commonly including: leadership training; improved complaints mechanisms to promote increased reporting of sexual harassment; flexible work by default; and targets for female recruitment, access to development opportunities and promotion (the latter of which was proposed by the majority of jurisdictions prior to the release of their reviews) (Elizabeth Broderick & Co, 2016; EOC SA, 2016; VEOHRC, 2015).

Yet, implementation is proving challenging to all. As experienced elsewhere, including in the UK (Dick and Cassell, 2002; Loftus, 2009), backlash against the “gender agenda” is widespread, with men and women alike contesting the appropriateness of targets and openly challenging the prevalence of sexual harassment and discrimination. This comes as no surprise. Police cultures are notoriously averse to change, and resistance is a healthy feature of all organisational change processes. Yet, as we argue in following sections, both a rhetorical and practical shift towards enabling all to bring their authentic selves to work, both for the benefit of the organisation and for individuals, may ultimately hasten progress.

**From diversity to inclusion**

Whilst both the rationale for, and the purported benefits of diversity, are laudable, the extent to which demographic diversity results in the uptake of different ideas and ways of operating is less clear. Experience in many sectors increasingly cautions against the hazards of a “compliance” approach to diversity (where the emphasis rests upon numbers), urging for a more developmental approach which focusses upon valuing and accepting difference (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2017). With this frame, the emphasis shifts from “categories” of person that have typically suffered from discrimination (e.g. women, people of colour, people with a disability and members of the LGBTIQ communities) towards human beings and their complex identities, which, if harnessed, result in significant individual and organisational gains. But achieving this requires deep systemic change in an organisation and its culture(s), and this is difficult to do. Alarmingly, despite decades of attention, diversity and inclusion remain undertheorised concepts, we know very little about what strategies successfully promote workforce diversity, and we are even less informed about the way in which cultures of inclusion can be fostered (Jonsen et al., 2011; Shore et al., 2011).

It is relatively easy to recruit more women, more black and minority ethnic members, more members that identify as LGBTIQ, but asking police organisations to look beyond the lens of “interest groups”, to tolerate and celebrate different ways of thinking and operating, requires a fundamental shift away from the command and control hierarchy that has provided a comforting culture of certainty for members since their induction at the academy. Yet, it is this very change – the creation of an enabling environment in which all people (not just women and other “groups”) can flourish – that provides the greatest opportunity for diversity to deliver on its promise of reform. This point is aptly made by Yoshino (2007), who drawing upon his experiences as a self-described “gay Asian law professor”, argued against viewing diversity through single-interest lenses, noting that: [...] we should understand civil rights to be a sliver of a universal project of human flourishing.

Civil rights has always sought to protect the human flourishing of certain groups from being thwarted by the irrational beliefs of others. Yet that aspiration is one we should hold for all humanity (Yoshino, 2007, p. 25).

“Civil rights has always sought to protect the human flourishing of certain groups from being thwarted by the irrational beliefs of others”

This is a point long-made by scholars (see e.g. Dill and Zambra, 2009; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016) who argue for multi-lens approaches, noting that single-lens approaches to analysis (such as a gender lens or a race lens) fundamentally misconstrue and misrepresent the human experience. And as such, policy responses (such as the establishment of quotas and special programmes for women) founded upon single-lens analyses are unlikely to bring about the changes they are intended to precipitate. This point has historically been made most acutely by African-American women, who argued that race fundamentally shapes the experience of American women, resulting in their marginalisation in a women’s rights discourse that is covertly premised upon an Anglo-Saxon norm (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016).
Human identities are framed around multiple axes, including gender, but also race, social class, age, education, sworn/unsworn status, sexuality, ability/disability and an infinite number of other variables. While recognising that policy is, to a large extent, dependent upon “categorising” people and issues, there is little doubt that successful policy is contingent upon accurate analysis, regardless of whether more nuanced analysis “muddles the waters” so to speak. Existing data obtained through recent reviews, such as those undertaken in Australia by Victoria Police, the AFP and South Australia Police, provide fertile grounds for further analysis and disaggregation on the basis of different demographic variables. This would greatly enrich our understanding of the various factors shaping people’s experiences of policing, and the value of bringing these different and often competing identities to the business of police work.

However, while recent reviews have provided us with an understanding of the impact gender has on men’s and women’s experience of policing (and notwithstanding the need to address directly the illegal and unhelpful behaviours these reviews have uncovered), conflating review responses with broader efforts to manage the need for greater “diversity of thinking” in police organisations, risks falling short of preparing our organisations to meet future needs. There is no doubt that increasing the number of women in policing is a necessary part of the quest for agile and smart organisations. As is increasing ethnic diversity, and increasing diversity of experience and education. But it is certainly not sufficient. To that end, in the following section, we explore some of the ways in which policing organisations across the world might harness the current impetus for gender equality (or other single-factor diversity solutions) so that the contributions of all can be better utilised for individual, organisational and societal advantage.

Expanding the agenda: the voices only matter if they are heard

Being there is not the same as being heard. While quotas for female or ethnic recruitment get “difference” in the door, neither individual flourishing nor organisational benefits will ensue in the absence of attention to structural and cultural practices that silence some and privilege the voices of others. As noted by Ferguson (1994, p. 82), “what counts as knowledge” and “who counts as knowers” matters. Statistical representation of different groups is a worthy starting point – and certainly looks impressive on paper. However, if an Anglo-hyper-masculinist culture of policing determines that only white male “voices” are heard, or if all of the voices in the organisation start to sound the same even if they come from non-white or female officers, few of the gains so commonly attributed to diverse workgroups will eventuate. That is, unless an inclusive or enabling environment is fostered, diversity will not ipso facto result in different ways of operating.

Whilst not articulating a full developmental pathway for the cultivation of workplace inclusion, we suggest that a number of practical steps may steer efforts in the right direction, namely, we recommend: a rhetorical shift from the language of diversity to the language of inclusion; a reconfiguration of police academy practice, leading to a focus upon inclusive leadership and the creation of cultures of learning; and cross-jurisdiction research on the effectiveness of current diversity promotion strategies, each of which is outlined below.

Language matters: shifting the rhetoric

Each of the Australian reviews, outlined above, resulted in a range of recommendations, some of which aim to promote demographic diversity (e.g. targeted recruitment), while others – such as leadership training – are intended to promote inclusion through more consultative leadership styles. Yet, it is the push for demographic diversity that has most viscerally captured the workforce – with affirmative action strategies deemed “reverse discrimination”, and women reluctantly (or not) applying for promotion, lest they be labelled “vagina promotions”. Put simply, the language of inclusion has been lost in the storm.

Two of the three jurisdictions in which reviews occurred posited that “fixing gender equality” would result in the flow on benefits to less populous minority groups, suggesting that the task of addressing diversity in its broadest sense would be undertaken at a later date. Critiques of this logic aside, we suggest that the time is now – and that the dominant narrative shift its focus to people, rather than groups, such as women. In suggesting this, we are cognizant of the risk that seeing diversity through the lens of “all people” potentially disables categories that have historically (and continue to) suffered (Liff and Wajcman, 1996). We do not recommend the wholesale abandonment of affirmative action strategies, then, which are a necessary temporary measure to level the playing field. We do, however, suggest that corporate messages emphasising the value of all human beings (with their different visible and invisible attributes) should be more dominant as they are likely to be less alienating and ironically, more inclusive. More specifically, if the business case for change is “improved operational effectiveness”, it is surely invisible characteristics such as informational, values and psychological diversity upon which we ought to focus, beginning at the academy.
Learning at the academy and beyond

The role of the police academy is pivotal to organisational efforts to foster cultures of inclusion. There is a process of enculturation, or de-civilisation, that occurs at police academies the world over. Recruit police officers receive formal and informal lessons on how to “be” a police officer. This includes formal lessons and drills designed to equip officers with the skills to arrest people lawfully, to investigate offending and to prepare briefs of evidence for court. It also includes informal schooling in how to carry oneself as an officer, how to get ahead in the police world and how to defer to one’s superiors. Challenging the hierarchy or the status quo is not rewarded at the academy, and so it is that a diverse range of recruits are “turned blue”. Is it any wonder, then, that when recruits come from the academy into the organisation, irrespective of their backgrounds, their experiences or their demographic characteristics, they have learnt the art of surviving an organisational culture which remains stubbornly impervious to change?

“Those that embody diversity also have a role to play in holding onto their difference and showcasing its value to the organization”

Recognising the crushing weight of culture and the need to fast track diversity further up the chain of command, some jurisdictions – notably the Metropolitan Police and others in the UK – have experimented with engaging members from outside the organisation at senior (Inspector and superintendent) levels. Ostensibly, a means of increasing diversity of experience at pivotal decision-making points in the organisation, Direct Entry provides a means for well-qualified and highly experienced professionals to bring their skills and expertise into policing at a level commensurate with non-policing careers. The jury is still out on the ability of Direct Entry to bring about true diversity and inclusion, and much will depend on how success is defined by the organisation and its members. If – as one of us has been told – success is defined by the extent to which a Direct Entry candidate and an in-house inspector/superintendent who has worked through the ranks are the same, then the opportunity of this scheme to demonstrate that the organisation truly values difference may have been lost. But if the organisation, its members and the Direct Entry candidates themselves can hold on to their diversity, their different ways of thinking and their different lenses, and if the organisation can celebrate these and make use of these, then in-roads will indeed have been made to building the inclusive organisation required to ensure that the promise of diversity can be delivered.

Of course the precursor – or at least a co-condition – of valuing diversity, is an appreciation that thinking differently about an issue can be of organisational and personal benefit. We have written elsewhere about the importance of police organisations being learning organisations (Herrington, 2016). Learning organisations are those in which “people continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, collective aspiration is set free, and people learn how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p. 3). To value learning is to value difference and different points of view. Diversity and inclusion are aided by a culture of learning. In a culture of learning, difference is celebrated and rewarded – formally and informally; different ways of thinking are sought out; and questioning the status quo becomes a valued pro-social organisational activity.

There is much that leaders must do to create a culture of learning, and this must start with an appreciation of the value of polite dissent. Those that embody diversity also have a role to play in holding onto their difference and showcasing its value to the organisation. Courteous insubordination should be a characteristic that is nurtured, not eliminated, at the academy.

Classes and formal schooling in “being” a police officer should include knowing when and how to challenge the orthodoxy. Doing so should not be viewed as an exercise in ego, nor a crusade for those who identify strongly with their “difference”; it must be viewed as a moral requirement in the same way that intervening in a crime while being off duty is, or that reporting corruption is. This is not the same as calling for chaos, or an abandonment of process or command and control. Instead, we call for recruit training, education and continuing professional development to include the sensitive and respectful application of critical thinking skills and experience so as to equip the organisation with a valuable “other point of view”. The organisation and its culture rest on its members. And those members have been recruited to the organisation because of a recognition of the need for their skills. If the organisation is to learn how to value difference, then members need to value this difference themselves. Our organisations, our academies and our members need to celebrate their many shades of blue.

Contributing to the body of knowledge

Finally, we suggest that now is a ripe moment for policing organisations to contribute to global understandings of diversity and inclusion, with a particular focus upon contributing to the body of knowledge on “what works”. With three Australian jurisdictions busily implementing a plethora of review recommendations, jurisdictions in the UK
injecting diversity in non-gendered terms through Direct Entry, and many other jurisdictions pondering whether to take similar or different approaches, there is a veritable gold mine of data to be collected and analysed on: the impact of specific strategies (and, in turn, the impact of context on strategy success) on inclusion; the impact of rhetoric and discourse (diversity vs inclusion) on workforce change readiness; and the impact of different leadership styles upon inclusion. Collectively, this body of work would contribute not only to scholarly understandings of what works, but it could also assist jurisdictions to adopt a continuous learning approach to the implementation of initiatives intended to foster inclusion. Benefits would extend far beyond Australia, contributing to global policing and emergency services agencies’ allied reform efforts.

Beyond the immediate impact that different strategies can have on organisational diversity and inclusion, current interventions also pose fertile grounds for research that will contribute to theoretical understandings of inclusion, a development upon which the success of future efforts hinge. Much of the extant research on organisational diversity and inclusion is largely situated within the fields of psychology and management, with a flourishing body of work by social psychologists on social identity holding particular promise to enhance our understanding of the likely impacts of diversity management interventions (see e.g. Brewer, 1991; Brewer and Pierce, 2005, and related work by Shore et al., 2011). Yet, as noted by Jonsen et al. (2011), the diversity literature is a “not so diverse literature”, with limited contributions having been made by scholars from disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, both of which possess theories about sociality, diversity and inclusion that may be of particular value to explorations of the vagaries of promoting diversity and inclusion within strong police cultures. That is, we suggest that diversity in scholarship and its theoretical lenses itself is as important for the field of diversity and inclusion as the promotion of different ways of thinking in organisations.

Conclusion

Policing is grappling with a changing world, and a changing workforce, across the world. Diversity and its many incarnations are writ large in many of the reform efforts across the profession, and forces should be commended for this, and for efforts to promote greater gender equality within our traditionally masculine police organisations. Like men, women have a right to join the profession of policing, undertake their work in safe workplaces and progress through the ranks, should they choose to do so.

Increasing the number of women in policing will diversify the workforce, rendering – at least in part – policing organisations more reflective of the communities they serve. All of which is vitally important. However, it is important to remember that promoting gender equality is neither the same as promoting diversity nor is it the same as promoting inclusion. An increased number of women in the organisation increases the possibility that different voices will be heard and different ways of thinking and operating will be possible, but this is not a forgone conclusion. Moreover, expecting a simple shift in recruit numbers to “do the hard work” of cultural change and organisational reform is unfair to women themselves, and devalues the importance of diversity in its broadest sense. Taking these points together, we have argued in this paper for a shift in thinking around diversity to inclusion. We have argued that it is through creating inclusive workplaces that the diversity of ideas and thinking that is often embedded in individuals’ demographic characteristics can thrive and can start to contribute to the organisation in ways that provide value and embolden the individual.

By valuing true diversity – through inclusion – the unique experiences of all members can be appreciated. In doing so, we argue for a more expansive diversity agenda, and also for a more concerted effort to promote inclusive mindsets amongst police. Only then will the benefits of diversity be realised for the good of both the policing community and the broader communities it serves.
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