Chapter 1

Introducing concepts of workforce diversity

Shalene Werth[1], Charlotte Brownlow[1], and Jodie Gunders[2]

[1]University of Southern Queensland

[2]Australian Broadcasting Commission

Corresponding author: shalene.werth@usq.edu.au

Claire was a triple certificate nurse, and she had diabetes. When her illness prevented her from continuing to work in her profession, she sought a disability pension. During this process, she was told by a government employee that she was fat, lazy and did not want to work. Claire was forced onto a Newstart allowance (unemployment benefit) which required her to undertake volunteer work at a local school for disabled children. She enjoyed this work because she was not judged by others due to her size or her illness, and she was able to utilise some of her nursing skills as a teacher's helper. After a period of time, it became evident that her symptoms, which had been attributed to her diabetes were changing and she was ultimately diagnosed with a brain tumour. Claire has since passed away, and friends have only regret for the way she was treated by others who were quick to judge by appearances, social norms and unhelpful regulations. Claire's situation was particularly poignant, but the disadvantage she experienced is not unique.

The disadvantage experienced by individuals in the labour market due to particular personal characteristics is a "universal and permanently evolving phenomenon" (International Labour Organisation, 2017). The complexity of the interplay of these characteristics and the regulatory environments in which participants in the labour market engage, can result in negative workforce participation outcomes. The effective inclusion of these employees is a

legal requirement in many countries and yet there is still some way to go to achieve a positive diversity climate in workplaces and in the related regulatory environment.

Prasad, Pringle and Konrad (2006, p. 1) base their definition of diversity on groups that "have systematically faced discrimination and oppression at work… [including] non-whites, women, religious and ethnic minorities, individuals with physical disabilities, older employees, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people". We add to this list: people with invisible disabilities, young workers and individuals with various types of migrant status. "At its core, the concept of diversity is all about matters of difference and inclusion" (Prasad et al., 2006, p. 2).

These matters of difference may form hurdles which prevent the acceptance or inclusion, of those workers belonging to particular diversity groups, into the workplace a productive employees. These diversity groups could also be referred to as diverse social identity groups (Prasad et al., 2006, p. 2), we acknowledge that identity is in many ways a personal construct and membership of a "diverse social identity group" is not straight forward. An individual with a medical diagnosis might prefer not to identify as an individual with that condition in every social situation for example, but instead might choose an alternative identity to present in particular social situations (Goffman, 1986). The terms diversity group or diverse social identity group are used in this book to refer to groups of individuals who identify as a member of that group. Workers themselves tend to see their occupational identity as the most "salient identity at work" (Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016, p. 1115), while other aspects of their identity such as age, gender, or disability are considered to be less significant. Some workplaces will respond negatively to disclosure of a stigmatising characteristic. Many employees realise this and attempt to hide information that may be stigmatising from their employer (Vickers, 2017). Where members of a diverse social identity group are aware of the stigma, Vickers (2017, p. 4) points out that "it becomes critical that

the negative information about one's self be hidden". Williams-Whitt and Taras (2010, p. 535) note that "the preponderance of research suggests that employers harbour inaccurate beliefs based on negative stereotypes". Regardless of their legal obligations, employers tend to hold narrow perceptions of who is an ideal worker, and alternately, who is not. Available legal obligations and social expectations do not provide protection from the disadvantaging attitudes of employers.

The results of this can be considered a paradox: in the literature, a diverse workforce has been shown to provide a variety of benefits to workplaces, but disclosing a diverse identity, where an individual has a choice, may not be beneficial to that employee personally. It is important for employers to understand how diverse social identity groups contribute to their workplace. This book explores issues of identity and stigma as they relate to diverse social identities in the workplace. Identity is not well understood or appreciated in many social spaces. Understandings that define belonging are often developed through the normative expectations of others. Despite the best efforts of the activists in movements demanding social change, such as the disability movement, we are yet to see the full integration of individuals with differing personal characteristics into the structures of today's society.

There are changing views of what constitutes identity, and research that more closely examines the different types of identity is important. An individual's social identity can be considered as being "derived from the groups, statuses or categories that the individual is socially recognised as being a member of" (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005, p. 80). Where these indicators are not readily visible, people may have a choice about disclosure. Literature on the disclosure of invisible social identities has derived from researching sexual orientation (Ragins, 2004) and multi-racial identities (Leary, 1999), and has been explored in other fields such as chronic illness and work (Vickers, 2001).

Choices that are made about how to manage the disclosure of potentially stigmatising personal information have the potential to influence the success of the individual in the workplace. Sometimes, therefore a disclosure conversation can be a positive experience. More commonly though, it is a somewhat awkward sharing of what could be stigmatising information. The way it is received depends on the supervisor or colleague with whom it is shared. It can also be influenced by the culture and policies within the organisation. Many people - women who request assistance with career progression in a male-dominated field, individuals who are seeking accommodations to assist with a disability or chronic illness, older workers who are asking for a change in their working hours because of caring responsibilities, migrant workers who seek a change in working days because of their religious beliefs - might find that they have revealed stigmatising information in the process of making requests. However else they describe their need for assistance or accommodations, it is imperative that they preserve their appearance as a capable worker. A manager's preference for employees who conform to narrow conceptions of an ideal worker mean that workers with any characteristic that labels them as "other than a capable worker" may experience difficulties in their workplace.

This book seeks to explore challenges faced by individuals who are in some way *different*. It is organised around five key themes: disability; age; gender; migrant labour: and authority, power and support. In the first chapters which focus on *Disability,* we see that supervisors are often considered gatekeepers with considerable influence over both the culture of the organisation and acceptance of flexible working within the organisation (Skinner, Pocock, & Hutchinson, 2015). Where a supervisor implements inflexible expectations based on "normalcy" (or at least what is considered to be normal), they may disadvantage workers with different characteristics. The following chapters examine some workers who might be considered to have different characteristics.

Beatty and McGonagle (Chapter 2) explore the challenges for employees with chronic health conditions and the organisations in which they work. Bury's (1982) description of chronic illness as a "biographical disruption" can provide a catalyst for identity change for employees with chronic illness. Concepts from the fields of lifespan psychology and identity process theory are used to consider the way in which individuals respond and adapt their identities to a chronic health condition.

The ways that individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) navigate negative attitudes in the workplace is examined in Chapter 3. Brownlow, Werth and Keefe, reflect on the substantial emotion work undertaken by workers with ASD that influences the degree of success they experience in the workplace.

The second thematic section focuses on issues related to *age,* which examines the workplace experiences of workers who are young or ageing. Radford, Chapman, Bainbridge, and Halvorsen (Chapter 4) explore the ageing working population and associated opportunities and challenges. They offer diversity practices that might be undertaken to respond to the challenges and amplify the opportunities for this group of workers. Price and Grant-Smith (Chapter 5) look at the difficulties that young workers face when they are framed as "deficient" in terms of their skills profile, work ethic and personal attributes.

Gender forms the third theme, with contributions from Shah and Barker (Chapter 6) who look at the experiences of female Indian information technology workers working on international assignments. This chapter looks at the interaction between different characteristics, the authors note that "although most women lacked support from their organisations and in some instances from families, their motivation and the need for independence facilitated their assignment positively". Waldron, Southey and Murray (Chapter 7) explore the way that women survive the isolated echelons of the corporate ladder.

The authors use status characteristics theory to explore the experiences of women who have achieved executive-level positions or board memberships.

The fourth thematic section explores issues faced by *migrant workers*, beginning with Ní Shé and Joye (Chapter 8) who examine workers with more than a single diversity characteristic and discuss "superdiversity" in relation to the global care chain landscape in Ireland and outlines the disadvantage that can be experienced not only because of diversity characteristics but also because of the regulatory environment related to their migration status. Anderson (Chapter 9) looks at how that temporary migrants navigate the difficulties of working as seasonal labourers in regional Australia and she also highlights the impact that regulations play in the experiences of these workers.

The final theme focuses on issues of *authority, power, and support*. Brigden (Chapter 10) discusses these issues in her chapter, and highlights the effective ways that collective action through the trade union movement has recognised and assisted groups of workers. Brigden points out that there are a range of identities that are recognized as segmenting the workplace including: gender, race class, ethnicity, Indigeneity, dis/ability, sexual orientation/preference/identity. History shows that there is much to be gained by acting collectively, regardless of diverse individualising characteristics. Peetz (Chapter 11) further discusses the role that collectivist values play in the quest for equality for workers with diverse characteristics. He points out that collective workplace values and identity are as strong now as in earlier decades, the key difference is institutional changes that make collective action more difficult. Acting collectively provides power for groups of workers who are then better able to access outcomes which are important to the group. Labour market power as it relates to workers with diverse identities is of particular interest. Werth, Peetz and Broadbent (Chapter 13) examine the extent to which employees with chronic illness might experience disadvantage can depend on their labour market power.

One of the themes that has emerged from the different areas of diversity research in this book, is that diverse social identities of individuals in the workplace do not develop independently of the workplace. The workplace policy and procedures, positive and negative attitudes of colleagues, and the ability to meet with other people with the same diverse social identity within the workplace context will all influence the development of that employee's diverse social identity at work. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1165) identified a form of work, related to identity within particular roles in an organisation, known as "identity work". "Identity work refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness". This definition comes out of managerial literature but has a contribution to make in this space. Diverse social identities develop in different ways inside and outside of the working environment, but this is not well acknowledged in the workplace literature.

To not present accurately within the workplace is considered to be undesirable, while presenting the whole truth of a disability, for example, might be considered equally undesirable. The only path that remains is for those individuals to create an identity that might be unique to the workplace that consists of desirable workplace characteristics, such as working productively and positive organisational citizenship and collegial behaviours while also managing to present in an effective way aspects of a diverse social identity.

This book explores the challenges and opportunities that are specific to diverse social identities, whether they be singular or multiple, invisible or visible, influenced by regulation or not, whether they are stigmatising and finally how support, authority and power structures have the potential to influence the outcomes for these groups.

References

Bury, M. (1982). Chronic illness as biographical disruption. *Sociology of Health and Illness, 4*(2), 167-182.

Clair, J. A., Beatty, J. E., & MacLean, T. L. (2005). Out of sight but not out of mind: managing invisible social identities in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review, 30*(1), 78-95.

Goffman, E. (1986). *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc.

International Labour Organisation. (2017). International labour standards on equality of opportunity and treatment.   Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/equality-of-opportunity-and-treatment/lang--en/index.htm

Leary, K. (1999). Passing, posing and 'keeping it real'. *Constellations, 6*(1), 85-96.

Prasad, P., Pringle, J. K., & Konrad, A. M. (2006). Examining the Contours of Workplace Diversity: Concepts, Contexts and Challenges In A. M. Konrad, P. Prasad, & J. K. Pringle (Eds.), *Handbook of Workplace Diversity* (pp. 1-22). London: Publisher: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ragins, B. R. (2004). Sexual orientation in the workplace: the unique work and career experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual workers. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management, 23*, 35-120.

Santuzzi, A., & Waltz, P. R. (2016). Disability in the workplace: a unique and variable identity. *Journal of Management, 42*(5), 1111-1135.

Skinner, N., Pocock, B., & Hutchinson, C. (2015). *A qualitative study of the circumstances and outcomes of the National Employment Standards Right to Request provisions: A*

report to Fair Work Australia. Adelaide:Centre for Work+Life, University of South
Australia.

Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: organizational
fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations, 56*(10), 1163-1193.

Vickers, M. (2001). Unseen chronic illness and work: authentic stories from "women in-
between". *Women in Management Review, 16*(2), 62-74.

Vickers, M. (2017). Dark secrets of impression management: workplace masks of people
with multiple sclerosis. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal, online,* 1-21.

Williams-Whitt, K., & Taras, D. (2010). Disability and the performance paradox: can social
capital bridge the divide? *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 48*(3), 534-559.