Chapter 13

Reflections and conclusions

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In this book, we have examined the challenges and opportunities that employees with diverse social identities experience in their places of work. The themes of disability, age, gender, migrant status as well as historical and current issues relating to authority, power and support have been investigated.

Beatty and McGonagle (Chapter 2) explored work identity for this group of workers. Changing priorities after a diagnosis impacts on: health specific factors, personal factors and job design factors. These formed key aspects of this chapter. The chapter highlighted the varying interactions people with chronic illness must undertake in order to manage their working circumstances as well as their illness. Beatty and McGonagle pointed out that these employees attempt to "assimilate changes into their existing schemata for as long as possible until identity discrepancies become too large, then they will switch to accommodation strategies, which require changes in their self-schemata". These strategies explain the impacts on their changing identity and related working circumstances.

Employees with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) also seek out ways to manage their social identity in their workplace. The chapter by Brownlow, Werth and Keefe (Chapter 3) examined the emotion work undertaken by employees with ASD in order to manage the requirements of workplaces. Attempting to bring about a particular state of mind in others (Hochschild, 1983) required workers to undertake emotion work to minimise the stigma associated with their diagnosis.

We see in these chapters the conscious development of an identity that was considered appropriate for the workplace. The identity work that individuals with disability put into their professional identity was important for preserving their role at work. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1165) define identity work as "people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are

productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness". The references to "repairing" and "maintaining" are of particular interest to those with diverse social identities in the workforce. The disadvantage experienced by workers with disability or perhaps those from younger or older age groups, means that employees in these groups might need to work particularly hard to "establish trust" or "repair trouble" (Pinder, 1995, p. 607) as part of striving to maintain the persona preferred by their employer while also being part of a diverse social group. Beech (2008) made the point that these performances are interactive as part of identity work.

There is a role for management to improve the working experiences of employees who are members of diverse social groups. The culture along with relevant policies and procedures need to be deliberately developed to support the diversity climate within the organisation. Beatty and McGonagle (Chapter 2), Radford, Chapman, Bainbridge and Halvorsen (Chapter 4), and Price and Grant-Smith (Chapter 5) point to strategies that could be incorporated to assist in building such as culture. Where organisations provide strategies that reflect the changing needs of a diverse workforce such as opportunities for flexible working, redeployment of workers with changing needs and career building programmes for young workers, they have the opportunity to start moving towards developing a diversity climate. Hofhuis, van der Rijt and Vlug (2016, p. 1) state that "diversity climate [is] defined as an organisational climate characterised by openness towards and appreciation of individual differences". A move towards developing a diversity climate within organisations would suggest that underlying values of openness and individual differences would be promoted within the organisation in addition to the current regulations. However desirable this might be, there are many organisations that fail to even meet their legal requirements and this issue is the basis of much diversity research.

Waldron, Southey and Murray state in Chapter 7 that "despite legislative, industry and organisational efforts to address issues of discrimination and stereotypical treatment, gender remains a constraint in the work life of women at the executive echelons of organisations". This is a salient point and one that is also accurate for other diverse social identities. Pringle, Konrad and Prasad (2006, p. 537) points out that diversity research cannot afford to ignore the "interplay among multiple identities, oppressions and inequalities in organisational contexts" and they note that "increasing mobility of labour globally is likely to increase and provide research sites to open up understanding". Shah and Barker (Chapter 6) examined gender, race and international work assignments, while Ní Shé and Joye (Chapter 8) explored

superdiversity within a particular demographic, political and economic context (Pringle et al., 2006). Anderson (Chapter 9) examined issues associated with the precarious nature of the work undertaken by working holidaymakers. Each of these studies elucidate key points associated with particular combinations of diversities. This research is important as the movement of workers becomes increasingly fluid.

Questions of power and support arise when we see that existing regulatory structures may not be sufficient to support the changes in an increasingly diverse workforce. Werth, Peetz and Broadbent (Chapter 12) explored issues associated with power and disclosure for women with chronic illness, noting that workers with the greatest amounts of labour market power were more likely to have positive working outcomes. Generally, the diagnosis of an on-going disease is linked to poorer workforce outcomes for these workers. This is not necessarily because of the illness but because the attitudes of managers and co-workers can mean that any accommodations may not be available and they might find that they are "managed out" of the workplace. Employees who have higher levels of labour market power were less likely to have this occur. The authors reported that membership of a trade union had the potential to improve outcomes at work.

Brigden (Chapter 10) explored the history of diverse social identities within the trade union movement in Australia. Important work related and social justice gains for diversity groups were achieved through the associational power provided through trade union membership. Acting collectively is important for diversity groups particularly as social support from others in the same diversity group helps individuals to form a positive diverse identity. Negative reactions of others in the workplace, for example work supervisors, can also impact on the development of identity. Further to this, workers with disability might assess the reactions of others while they consider whether their impairment should be considered to be a disability at all (see Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016). Developing positive formal (ie employee support networks) and informal (ie friends or contacts with the disability or other identity) networks are important. Formal networks in terms of trade union membership can effectively use collective power to ensure the legal rights of workers with diverse identities are preserved within the work environment. Peetz (Chapter 11) discussed the importance of collectivism and presents evidence that management increasingly attempts to individualise workers – that is, take away their scope for collective action - in the workplace and implications of this.

Power within organisations might reside with different individuals or groups, it is important to understand the significance of the role of power within the workplace. Where individuals with diverse identities are disadvantaged by the decision of a supervisor, that worker might seek support from the union to advance their case. Without this support they might choose to endure disadvantage fearing other negative repercussions. Konrad (2003, p. 11) pointed out that "…attending to power/dominance dynamics among identity groups can improve our understanding of intergroup relations in organizations".

As workforce diversity increases and workers become aware of or develop more diverse identities challenges become evident about how their needs should be met. When we approach diversity in the workforce this way, it is tempting to think that more "individualised" identities make collective action less likely. Although, collective action is how workers achieve their goals. And while many of the gains for diverse social identity groups have been achieved through their collective power in various forms, it is ultimately through collective industrial organisation and action that they will achieve gains (see Chapter 10). Some have attempted to argue that the scope for collective organisation has been diminished by the growth of diverse social identity groups. And some oldstyle traditionally male, blue-collar unionists might believe that the emergence of such groups is what leads to reduced interest in trade unionism; but this would not be correct. We see that the values that favour collective action and collective workplace identity are as strong now as they were decades ago. In many respects this should not be surprising, if we consider that people can, and very often do, have multiple social identities. Identifying as a female or a migrant doesn't prevent an individual from also identifying as a worker.

For the problems and issues facing workers in diverse social identity groups to be properly addressed, they have to develop more power within the workplace, and that is something that can be achieved, even though institutional changes over the past three decades have sought to reduce worker power. Trade unions would be well advised that, if they are to grow, they need to take advantage of this "new" workforce development, promote alliances with these diverse social identity groups and articulate support for their concerns and priorities.

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