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# 'Rorting the System': Police Detectives, Diversity, and Workplace Advantage

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**Abstract:** Internal workplace practices and policies in policing are based on a notion of fairness and equal opportunity. Yet police organizations are frequently criticized for discriminatory policing practices, unfair and biased workplace practices, and poor interpersonal treatment of officers. Whilst there is a wide body of research examining diversity in relation to external police practices, there is a lack of knowledge regarding diversity and internal workplace practices; particularly from the perspective of police detectives who often have more substantial policing experience and longer employment histories than other non-commissioned officers. Contributing new findings to the extant policing literature, this research analyzes data collected from interviews with twenty police detectives working in one of the largest Australian police organizations. It suggests that police detectives in this study have negative perceptions of diversity, and associate diversity with unfair advantages in the workplace. In Australian culture, the phrase 'rorting the system' is an informal expression used to describe individuals or groups of people who take unfair advantage of a public service or workplace policy to change their circumstances. The findings suggest that detectives in this study believe diversity enables some officers to take advantage of workplace policy and 'rort' the system.

**Keywords:** policing; police detectives; diversity; workplace; advantage; rort



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## 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the composition of organizational workforces in Australia has been altered to reflect diversity in the workplace and the perceived need for organizations to employ people based on differences in identity, characteristics, and abilities [1]. Underpinned by changes to human and civil rights over several decades, organizations and institutions in Australia have followed workforce diversity initiatives implemented to increase the employment of people historically underrepresented in professions dominated by majority groups [1]. One institution affected by such initiatives is policing. Critics of policing in Australia and ongoing policing reforms across each of the Australian state police organizations have highlighted the importance of the diversification of Australian police, and the inclusion of people from minority groups [2]. Whilst many Australian police organizations have created internal workplace policies to support the inclusion of diverse staff and strategic recruitment drives to increase the number of officers employed from diverse groups, policing in Australia continues to attract people from majority groups [3].

Like policing in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, although the number of diverse identified employees is increasing in Australian police organizations, the number of officers identified as belonging to a majority group continues to outweigh the number of employees employed from diverse groups [3]. For example, police organizations across the globe employ more males than females who often identify as heterosexual, White, and Catholic [4]. Whilst almost all police organizations are aware of the need to increase the number of diverse identified employees (and there is an immeasurable number of attributes on which people may differ), police organizations strategically seek to increase

the numbers of diverse employees based on observable characteristics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and age, as well as less observable characteristics such as sexuality, ability, education level, and religion [1]. Recruitment becomes, therefore, an exercise in employee numbers and statistics rather than relating to the benefits that a diversified organization can have in relation to professional practice, and how this may affect employees and workplace performance [5].

The lack of employment of police officers from diverse groups raises questions about whether police organizations are reflective of the communities they serve, as well as the ability of police organizations to police all members of the community effectively, and diversity in relation to organizational competency [6–11]. These issues have been examined in policing literature researching police engagement [5,7,11,12], but diversity in policing also raises questions about whether police officers perceive diversification within the organization as positive or negative in terms of employee morale, and perceptions of equal opportunity and workplace performance. There is, however, a paucity of Australian research examining diversity in relation to its effects on the workplace and internal workplace practices in policing, with much of the Australian research examining external police practice from the perspective of recruits, police liaison officers, senior officers, or officers employed in general duty policing [7]. There is also a lack of Australian research examining policing from the perspective of police detectives generally, but particularly in relation to workplace performance and workplace practices. This is interesting given that police detectives in Australia (like the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States), typically have more substantial policing experience, and longer employment histories than other non-commissioned officers within police organizations [13].

Workplace performance has also been researched in terms of general duty police officers and police–citizen engagement, procedural justice, and police misconduct in Australian and international contexts [6–11]. Research examining police detectives and internal workplace practices, and how diversity affects this, however, is still in need of systematic inquiry. This research sought to address these gaps in knowledge regarding diversity and its effects on internal workplace practices and focused on police detectives and experiences of workplace diversity. Conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with police detectives working in one of the largest Australian police organizations, this research used three hypothetical vignettes (each containing a different case study) to prompt answers to open-ended questions regarding diversity in the workplace. As such, this research contributes four key findings and new knowledge to the extant policing literature. It suggests that police detectives link diversity to notions of internal workplace advantage, and that an officer's diverse identity could be used advantageously either internally within the workplace (in relation to the reduction of workload, responsibilities, or duties) or in relation to taking advantage of internal workplace policies. Whilst none of the case studies within the hypothetical vignettes focused on specific aspects of diversity, the police detectives negatively associate gender, sexuality, and religion with internal workplace advantage. This is a surprising finding, and, hitherto this study, one which has not emerged in previous studies examining policing and diversity in the workplace.

In the last decade, most Australian police organizations initiated strategic plans to embed diversity and inclusion practices within the workplace and refocused much of their operational policies to reflect this inclusion [1]. Yet previous research analyzing workplace practices in police organizations highlight policies and practices which frequently exclude members of diverse groups from notions of traditional modes of policing [11] and from workplace entitlements and promotion [3,6,8–10]. Much of the research examining diversity and internal workplace practices also focuses on policing as a service and how it can improve external operational practices by including diverse people (see [5,12]). It also examines the impact of workplace discrimination and the impact this can have on policing practice and career prospects [11].

There is, however, a lack of research regarding internal managerial processes in policing and how diversity is managed in terms of recruitment strategies to increase the numbers

of diverse people in policing [3]. This is problematic given that ambiguity and a lack of transparency concerning the recruitment of diverse officers consistently emerge in much of the policing literature [3]. Workplace recruitment strategies underpinned by notions of diversity are about increasing and retaining more people from traditionally underrepresented groups within all facets of an organization and providing equal opportunities for all employees regardless of identity [14]. Police organizations, however, are constantly criticized for the overrepresentation of majority group members in policing and the lack of diversity of officers [14]. This is not to suggest that police organizations have ignored recruitment drives and specific mandates to increase the number of diverse officers, because many police organizations around the globe recognize the need to overcome this challenge and are focused on recruiting people from diverse groups [3]. In Australia, increasing the diversity of the police force as well as the capacity of the police officers to engage with diverse groups of people, is an ongoing endeavor, and one that is a priority for many police organizations [3].

It is argued that a more representative police force is more likely to effectively understand its citizens' needs than a police force comprising majority group members, thereby resulting in better cohesion, and lowering crime rates [7,11,14]. Recruitment guidelines based on representation support the idea that individuals from all groups in society should be able to undertake a policing career. However, many police organizations are criticized for discriminatory recruitment practices, intrinsically affected by conscious and unconscious bias or stereotypes regarding diversity and policing capability [2]. Whilst organizational reactions to the need to increase the representation of diverse people in policing have resulted in changes to many policies and practice documents in police organizations across the globe, critics argue that improvements are still needed [15].

Proponents of the Representative Bureaucracy perspective suggest that organizations such as the police can increase their representation of their constituents by including members of minority groups within their ranks (passive representation) as well as having members of the organization actively pursue policies and practices that include the interests of all members (active representation) [16]. Increasing passive and active representation within organizations has been determined to decrease inequalities and increase fair workplace practices [17]. This may be a direct result of the increase of diverse people within organizations or it may be that the majority group within an organization is sensitized to the concerns of diverse people through increased contact [18]. Based on the premise of the Intergroup Contact Hypothesis [18–20] and contact between racial groups, it is suggested that positive contact between members of different groups breaks down unconscious stereotypes by replacing common negative stereotypes with positive experiences. Evidence from police research across the globe, however, suggests that an increase in diverse police officers can lead to increases in racial profiling of diverse citizens [15]. Whilst this has been researched in areas such as the United States, this is an area of research that is still in need of further investigation, particularly in the context of policing and organizational culture in Australia.

It is argued that police organizational culture in Australia has moved forward in terms of the value it places on diversity within the workforce and the impact this has on external service delivery [7]. Critics of police organizations, however, argue that diversity in relation to the provision of external service often precedes initiatives regarding diversity in the workplace and the internal effect it has on the level of job satisfaction of officers [21]. Globally, police officers consistently report lower perceptions of job satisfaction, higher levels of job stress, and increased criticism from within police organizations regarding unfair and biased workplace practices, and biased and poor interpersonal treatment [21,22]. Whilst bias (explicit and implicit) and negative stereotypes regarding an organization's workforce can occur across all levels of an organization, it is argued that it is heightened when it stems from top-down practices [23].

Managerial bias has been shown to strongly influence employee behavior, and consequently low levels of collegiality among employees [24]. Police organizations are heavily

criticized as being organizations entrenched in bias from top-down practices, and previous research has examined the impact this has on internal workplace practices and the ability of officers to work cohesively and collegially [23]. Workplace interaction and interpersonal treatment between colleagues are heavily influenced over time by police culture, time in the job, organizational policies, and practices, positive and or negative interactions with colleagues, and conscious and unconscious biases and stereotypes [7]. However, whether the collective diversity of the workforce and the individual diversity of officers have an impact on internal workplace practices in Australian policing is unknown and is a distinct gap in knowledge and one that needs further research.

## 2. Materials and Methods

An email was sent by one of Australia's largest police organizations (de-identified for ethics reasons <sup>1</sup>) to a cohort of its police detectives to participate in a series of semi-structured interviews regarding perceptions of diversity in the workplace and how this may shape internal workplace practices <sup>2</sup>. The email included the contact information of the research team and information about the study and outlined that the research was being conducted independently of the police organization. In accordance with Western Sydney University's Human Research Ethics Committee approval, the email clearly informed all the officers that participation in the semi-structured interviews was entirely voluntary, and that all participants in the interviews would be de-identified.

Officers were informed that the first set of interviews would invite participants to read three hypothetical vignettes (see Appendix A) with each vignette containing a case study in relation to internal workplace practices. Case Study One (Amy) referred to an officer requesting extended leave from work due to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Case Study Two (Sarah) referred to an officer feeling overlooked at work regarding career opportunities and in social contexts due to the disclosure of her same-sex relationship. Case Study Three (Mohamed) referred to an officer sustaining a workplace injury whilst training to move to a different policing unit. Upon reading each of the hypothetical vignettes, all participants were asked open-ended questions. Although the hypothetical vignettes and the questions used in the semi-structured interviews did not explicitly discuss diversity, each question was designed to elicit data regarding internal workplace practice in relation to diversity. The interview responses ranged in terms of depth of answer, and as such, interview duration times ranged from 20 to 45 min each.

Officers were informed that hypotheses would be drawn from the initial analysis of the data and a second set of follow-up interviews would be conducted to confirm the findings. Participants were also informed that the individual transcripts of the interviews would not be disclosed to the organization, and as such, participation in the study would not impact their professional relationship with (or standing within) the organization. The email also explained that each participant would be given a unique identifier (such as a letter of the alphabet) and all responses used in later publications would be anonymized. It was hoped that by outlining this information, police detectives would be willing to engage in the research and offer interview responses free from social desirability. Because the initial number of police detectives contacted by the police organization via email to participate in the interviews was not disclosed to the research team, exact participant response rates could not be calculated. All the interviews were recorded on a digital audio recording device and were subsequently transcribed verbatim into Word documents. The Word documents were then analyzed using a constructivist grounded theory analytical approach.

### 2.1. Constructivist Grounded Theory Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory analysis was used to analyze the data, and to determine the presence of perceptions of diversity in each of the participant's responses to the hypothetical internal workplace situations. Grounded theory is an approach whereby apparent themes from within the text are revealed during the analytical process, and hypotheses are drawn from the data to present for further testing [25]. The research

team specifically adopted a 'modified constructivist grounded theory approach' whereby concepts were formed from interpretations of the data by using line-by-line analysis [26].

It was determined that by using this approach the research team could better understand how each participant views their own workplace culture in relation to diversity and each of the hypothetical situations. Each of the interview transcripts was rigorously read and apparent recurrent themes were given labels to allow for comparing, conceptualizing, and categorization of the data. Once all the key concepts were formed into categories, four core themes emerged from the interviews. Upon completion of twenty interviews, it was determined that the saturation of the themes was reached because clear recurring themes were present in the data, and the analysis of the data reached a point where no new information emerged. Each of the themes was assessed in relation to the detective's perception of internal workplace practices and diversity to articulate the meaningful discussion that follows in the analysis of the findings. The research team was also very aware of their subjectivity and how this may influence the interpretation of the data. As such, careful consideration of interpreter bias and how this may shape interpretation and meaning within the data was applied to each analytical process, and to all the findings considered for inclusion in this research.

## 2.2. Participants

Whilst inclusion of officers from other job streams was considered, police detectives were targeted as participants for this research. To become a detective in an Australian police organization, officers work in general duties (uniform) policing before the completion of detective training and progression to this role. As such, detectives have a substantial employment history within the organization and can offer insight into diversity in the workplace and how this may shape internal workplace practices. The final study comprised two rounds of semi-structured interviews with twenty police detectives across the organization. Thirteen participants were Detective Senior Constables, six participants were Detective Sergeants, and one participant was a Detective Inspector. Their length of employment within the organization ranged from seven to twenty-seven years, with the average length of employment being seventeen years. The age range of the participants was twenty-nine to fifty-four years old, with the average age being forty years old. Four participants were female, and sixteen participants were male. Participant demographics relating to race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual preference were not asked, because it was determined that this could potentially identify detectives working in smaller policing commands. Any identifying information (or potential re-identifying information) contained within each of the participant's responses was also removed.

## 2.3. Methodological Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the use of hypothetical vignettes may not be comparable to data collected in real-life situations [27]. Second, whilst the hypothetical vignettes and case study examples are based on real-life scenarios, only three vignettes were used, and the use of other situations or hypothetical contexts of policing may result in different outcomes regarding the themes which emerged and the police detective's perceptions of internal workplace practices and diversity. Third, the study was conducted with only one Australian state police organization and as such, further research with other Australian state police organizations could determine if the findings are representative of police detectives working in different police organizations. Despite these limitations, this study provides important insight into the way police detectives in one of the largest police organizations in Australia perceive internal workplace practices and diversity.

## 3. Results

When the semi-structured interviews were complete and the findings were analyzed using constructivist grounded theory analysis, the themes which emerged from the analysis indicated that the participants' perceptions of diversity were linked to notions of advantage

regarding internal workplace practices. Under this premise, an officer's diverse identity could be used to the advantage of the diverse officer either in the workplace (in relation to the reduction of workload, responsibilities, or duties) or in relation to taking advantage of a workplace policy to 'rort the system'. In Australian culture, the phrase 'rorting the system' is an informal expression used to describe individuals or groups of people who take unfair advantage of a public service or workplace policy to change their circumstances [28].

### 3.1. Perceptions of Internal Workplace Advantage or 'Rorting the System' and 'Gender'

When discussing the first hypothetical vignette with Case Study One ('Amy') where the female officer in the vignette was on maternity leave and had also been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (thereby requiring more time away from work on sick leave), many of the participants discussed that this female officer was 'rorting the system' or unfairly taking advantage of a workplace policy to suit her needs. This practice was seen as worse if a female officer was also identified as diverse or if they were considered different from other officers, or if they had specific needs to complete work-related tasks. For example, whilst 'Amy' was not considered diverse in terms of her identity, her gender (being female) was emphasized by male participants as a distinct identifier, marking her as 'different' to other officers (males) and as such her maternity leave was seen as a 'special need' and an advantageous rort or change to the system. There was also the perception that 'Amy' was simply using her PTSD diagnosis to extend the designated time allotted for maternity leave, or to obtain her desired return to work arrangement. The diagnosis was seen as purposeful in its inclusion rather than coincidental, and as a way for 'Amy' to seek an advantage over other employees. For example, Participant A stated:

*'It would be seen to be that she hasn't got her own way and therefore she's 'rorting the system' ...'*

Participant A.

Many of the participants discussed that 'Amy' was deliberately taking advantage of maternity leave and health-related leave entitlements to the detriment of her colleagues. When discussing Case Study 1 ('Amy'), it was frequently mentioned by participants that when an officer is viewed by colleagues to be 'rorting the system' they are '*deliberately being unhelpful*' and purposefully leaving work for other colleagues to complete. Almost all the participants stated that from a '*team-player perspective*' this behavior was viewed badly since other officers would see this officer as using the system to their own advantage. In relation to Case Study One ('Amy'), almost all the participants believed that 'Amy' was pretending to have PTSD so she did not have to go back to work, indicating that participants were assuming that 'Amy' was claiming to be sick so she could continue her lifestyle at home:

*'I would not have a lot of sympathy for Amy, I think she's pulling the leg, pulling the police's legs.'*

Participant B.

*'Whether rightly or wrongly, a lot of times they'll just unfortunately say, she's ... playing the head noises card<sup>3</sup> ...'*

Participant C.

Whilst the participant's perceptions of 'Amy' garnered interesting discussion and offered insight into their perceptions of workplace practices as well as their perceptions of 'rorting the system' it is important to note that this vignette did not indicate that 'Amy' was likely to be taking advantage of workplace policies regarding maternity leave or 'rorting the system' in any way. This raises questions about the perception of gender and workplace competency and performance, and how officers (both male and female) may place harsher judgement on workplace practices when an officer is female rather than male [3]. Whilst many of the participants alluded to this in their discussion of the first vignette, some of the participants felt that female colleagues whose workplace demands are not met will pretend to have specific issues so they can look after their own self-interest in terms of workload,

which is likely to reduce their ability to be seen as a team player from other police officers. For example, Participant D and Participant E stated:

*'If she's trying to use the part-time "return to work agreement" to not come back to work and do what she joined to do, but to come back to work on something that's a little bit easier, and more of a lifestyle for her, well that's a little bit selfish.'*

Participant D.

*'It's typical of "people" in the police force these days, they have a higher expectation on their own personal benefits as opposed to those that benefit the organisation.'*

Participant E.

One participant believed this self-interest was often the trigger for officers taking sick leave for stress or PTSD after their workplace demands were not approved:

*'There's always a catalyst that brings out this stress disorder and it's usually someone not getting their way.'*

Participant F.

Another participant mentioned that when colleagues fraudulently 'rort the system', they are seen as ruining it for other officers who might genuinely need to use the system during times of need, and that this type of practice was viewed as detrimental to all the officers working around this colleague, as well as to the organization. For example, some participants spoke about this happening in relation to one workplace scheme used by the police organization to compensate officers experiencing workplace injury, disability, and death. Many of the participants perceived that these types of fraudulent claims were common in the police organization. For example, Participant G said:

*'It's so difficult in this organisation because so many people rort it, if you like, and stuff it up for everyone else . . . '*

Participant G.

After reading the first vignette, many of the participants spoke about the perception that female officers are viewed as 'less useful' as work colleagues than male officers and, some participants alluded to female officers having the advantage of workplace policies relating to maternity leave, so that they can return to work in a part-time rather than full-time capacity. This is seen to be to the detriment of those who cannot take advantage of these policies. For example, Participant J, Participant A, and Participant K said:

*'In my workplace, I understand that they aren't keen to take any more part-timers in my particular area and part-timers are generally women . . . so that would mean that there's probably less chance of a female getting a new position in our job unless she's full-time...'*

Participant J.

*'I watched one policing command be decimated by "maternity leave arrangements" and we suddenly had half of the office on part-time or on maternity leave, and all the rest of it, the cases were falling by the wayside...'*

Participant A.

*'Females I know have already caused issues in our command. They cause issues in most detective's offices, just by working part-time, I know it's sexist, but it does affect the running of an office and I know in my area, I think they've even been stopped, no more part-timers... like they can't cope with them anymore.'*

Participant K.

The first hypothetical vignette triggered interesting responses from each of the participants regarding whether female officers strategically use their gender identity to alter workload expectations, with some participants stating that female officers (especially those working part-time) are not as dedicated to their work and the role of policing than male officers working part-time or full-time, and many of the participants expressed concern regarding equality in the workplace and what this would mean for operational duties should

more numbers of female officers be employed. Many of the participants presumed that all female officers would share the same perspective regarding work, thereby stereotyping female officers in their inability to commit to the demands of the workplace. For example, Participant E stated:

*'If you were to say that investigation teams are going 50/50 (50% male 50% female), it would be a massive issue for a manager of investigation teams, if you then had 50% of your workforce only there part-time or casually or not committed to being available, not being prepared to travel, not being prepared to work overtime, not being flexible in respect to the workplace and not being committed to being at the workplace as opposed to being at the home, that would be very detrimental as far as managing a team goes...'*

Participant E.

Although one participant disclosed that female officers are competent in the workplace, the participant argued that it is an officer's gender 'as a female' which causes problems in the workplace, particularly in relation to the overall running of the policing command. This participant stated:

*'Women . . . it's not about competence anymore and it's not about whether they can do the job, it's about performance more in relation to being a woman, women would "have" to go on maternity leave, they will require part-time agreements, they will have to work certain shifts, which creates a chain reaction of workload amongst everybody in the office...'*

Participant L.

This idea was also supported by another participant who spoke about the work-related problems that part-time female officers create in the workplace and how the police organization does not support the current part-time work policies in practice. For example, Participant J stated:

*'The organisation wouldn't allow it because you do a week of on call, and it's very hard for them because a female officer will say well, I can't do this day, but I can do this day . . . and one day a week . . . why are you bothering coming back to work? I used to work with a lady that came back one day a week and . . . by the time you clear your emails, and you had a chit chat in the corridor, I don't see why you're bothering being at work.'*

Participant J.

Many of the participants described the challenges that female part-time officers create for police organizations, particularly in terms of female officers not being dedicated to the work or the role of a police officer, and the assumption that female officers (regardless of sexuality) will take maternity leave, have children, and work part-time. Almost all the participants expressed that whilst women entering the organization should change their perception of police work and adjust their lifestyles to fit into the existing work structures, existing police officers should not be expected to alter their workplace roles, responsibilities, and work schedule just to accommodate the needs of new (female) employees. Many participants clearly felt the status quo of the workplace in policing should be maintained, and female officers were welcome provided they accepted the structure and did not try to make changes to it. For example, Participant M and Participant E said:

*'All these new (female) police should be told what our culture is, and what is expected of them...'*

Participant M.

*'In my workplace it's fairly indicative by the numbers of women in our department that the work style doesn't suit women, we work long hours, we work irregular hours, we work a lot of overtime, we work away from the home a lot, so for women who choose a work life balance with children, family and that type of thing, our work environment doesn't suit that, and if you're in a position where you are trying to achieve that balance, our work style doesn't cater for that as much as other work environments I don't think.'*

Participant E.



### 3.2. Perceptions of Internal Workplace Advantage or ‘Rorting the System’ and ‘Same-Sex Sexuality’

When discussing the second hypothetical vignette with Case Study Two (‘Sarah’), many of the participants were concerned that ‘Sarah’ (an officer who is open about her same-sex relationship) was purposefully using her sexuality to rort the system to hide her incompetence in the workplace. Whilst ‘Sarah’ was viewed as an incompetent colleague, and unprofessional police officer, it was clearly discussed by both male and female participants that ‘Sarah’ would be likely to use her sexual identity to counterclaim the negative perception of her workplace competency and argue that the accusation of incompetence is discrimination against her sexuality, rather than her diminished workplace performance. Many of the participants perceived that ‘Sarah’ would ‘play the gay card’ in these circumstances and use her sexual identity to her advantage. In Australian culture, the expression ‘playing the card’ is often associated negatively with an individual’s or group’s identity and is typically used as a discriminatory expression to dismiss or discredit an argument or an issue raised [28]. It is also used to dismiss an individual’s or group’s circumstances or needs, and as such, it is negatively linked with an individual or group trying to gain an unfair advantage in specific circumstances. For example, Participant G and Participant H said:

*‘Sarah’s playing the gay card if I can put it that way.’*

Participant G.

*‘Throwing the gay card on the table ... she’s obviously gonna complain about her sexuality’*

Participant H.

Some of the participants also discussed that ‘Sarah’ was ‘hiding behind’ her sexual identity and blaming her sexual identity as a lesbian or bisexual woman to justify why she was being poorly appraised, because they believed the real reason behind her poor workplace performance was her incompetence as an officer. For example, Participant A and Participant I stated:

*‘People will write her off for that ... well you’ve got the shits, because you’re not getting what you want, and ... you’re pushing a hot button (being the homophobia type stuff) to get what you want.’*

Participant A.

*‘They would probably say ... she thinks we don’t like her because she’s gay, but really, it’s because she’s incompetent.’*

Participant I.

If ‘Sarah’ is being overlooked for workplace opportunities or is being discriminated against by other colleagues in the workplace and has proof that this is related to her sexual identity, then she would certainly be entitled to make a complaint about this (and counterclaim any accusations) under workplace discrimination policies. ‘Sarah’ however, is only suspicious that her recent disclosure regarding her changed relationship status is related to her workplace issues, although many of the participants perceived that she was consciously and strategically making the link between her sexuality and her workplace incompetency to ‘rort the system’. Whilst ‘Sarah’s’ sexuality was not overtly linked to the issues of workplace incompetency raised in the vignette, the participants focused on her sexual identity, and made their own connections between her sexuality and her workplace performance. Many participants made this link as an explanatory tool to justify their perceptions regarding why ‘Sarah’ could react defensively or perceive the accusations of workplace incompetency as false. The vignette, however, does not state whether ‘Sarah’ is aware of her reputation, it simply states that she has a reputation for making poor operational decisions and has poor working relationships with other team members. The vignette implies that this reputation is known by other colleagues, but it is not clear whether ‘Sarah’ herself is aware of her

own incompetency. ‘Sarah’ associates the lack of workplace opportunities and exclusion from socialization with colleagues is due to her recently disclosed status as being in a same-sex relationship.

The link participants made between these aspects of the vignette, (‘Sarah’s’ diversity and aspects of workplace discrimination) has negative connotations regarding ‘Sarah’ ‘rorting the system’ or taking advantage of workplace policy simply because she is seen as different in terms of her sexuality. Previous research by Miles–Johnson [7,29,30] states that officers with diverse sexual or non-heteronormative identities (such as officers who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) are often viewed as part of an ‘out-group’ by police officers who identify with heteronormative expressions of sexuality. As a result, officers identifying with an LGB sexuality often have difficulties fitting into the overall culture of police organizations unless they express masculine traits or acceptable policing qualities deemed appropriate or as competent to complete police work [7,29–32]. Whilst previous research suggests that lesbian officers may fit in well with the masculine culture present in policing, the sexual identity of an individual (such as an LGB officer) is only ignored when the officer is a ‘good cop’ in terms of professionalism, work ethic, and respect [33,34]. In other words, if an LGB officer can show that they are reliable and professional and are not seen to be ‘rorting the system’ or taking advantage of workplace policies then their sexuality is overlooked, and they tend to be more widely accepted by their colleagues. This idea was supported by Participant G who stated:

*‘I don’t like anyone hiding behind their incompetence, hiding it behind the banner of being a female or being of a religious denomination or of a sexual denomination, no and I won’t tolerate that.’*

Participant G.

Consequently, diverse officers are seen to be ‘rorting the system’ when they mention their diversity in the context of other criticisms or issues that may be present, requiring this difference to remain as hidden as possible. In this instance, the participant associated ‘Sarah’s’ incompetence with the disclosure of her sexuality, thereby presuming that the disclosure of sexuality was being used to deflect workplace incompetence. This is interesting given that police work comprises many female officers who identify as lesbian or bisexual (see [3]), and numbers of LGB officers (albeit small) are slowly increasing in many Australian police organizations (see [7]), meaning that this diversity is becoming more visible. By disclosing her same-sex relationship, ‘Sarah’ had made herself more visible, making other people in her working environment uncomfortable and therefore justified in their negative judgments placed upon her competence. For example, Participant A stated:

*‘In relation to the same sex relationship . . . she will get negative comments from her work-mates because that’s just adding . . . it supports her poor operational decision making.’*

Participant A.

‘Sarah’s’ honesty about her same-sex relationship contributed to the participant’s perceptions that she was purposefully using her sexual identity to gain an advantage and ‘rort the system’. For example, Participant N, Participant J, and Participant L stated:

*‘It’s about fitting in . . . ’*

Participant N.

*‘They probably won’t be accepted and won’t be included in jobs.’*

Participant J.

*‘If you don’t fit a specific view or what they have in mind or what’s been the norm for many years, you’re kind of an outcast and you have to actually work double as hard to achieve something...’*

Participant L.

Research examining LGB officers disclosing sexual identities in the workplace suggests that police organizations fundamentally retain a hypermasculine and heterosexual orientation regarding perceptions of police officers, and as such, police organizations purposefully retain traditional and conservative values that officers are meant to uphold [4,30]. Therefore, LGB officers who do not belong to the stereotype of the normative white, heterosexual male definition of the prototypical 'cop' must negotiate this expectation and their identity status within the police organization, as well as normative workplace expectations placed upon them regarding workplace performance [4]. If an LGB officer is then viewed as challenging the traditional status quo or is seen to be seeking special privileges or is seen to be taking advantage of workplace policies that are rightfully in place to support all officers regardless of identity, it is the sexuality of the LGB officer which often increases blame or judgment upon the individual [32]. Non-heteronormative sexualities (whilst increasing in acceptance in many police organizations), are still viewed as being different from those expressed by most police officers who identify as heterosexual and are therefore subject to negative judgment based on traditional notions of sexuality and homophobia [4].

### *3.3. Perceptions of Internal Workplace Advantage or 'Rorting the System' and 'Religion and Culture'*

Although the third hypothetical vignette with Case Study Three ('Mohamed') did not contain any information about potential changes to the imaginary police organization's policing practices or workplace structures (since the vignette is about an officer sustaining a workplace injury), it was interesting to note that many of the participants linked this hypothetical situation to potential operational changes, unfairly linking and then blaming 'Mohamed's' religion and cultural practices as the cause of the change. Yet the case study did not specifically mention Mohamed's religious or cultural background. Many participants expressed their opinions that officers joining the police organization should expect to conform to existing policing structures and practices and negatively expressed their reluctance to change policing practices or workplace structures to accommodate the needs of other officers' religious or cultural practices. After reading 'Mohamed's' story, many participants openly stated that the police organization should limit the number of officers whose religion requires there to be specific changes made to the workplace or when an officer's religion requires alternative arrangements to be made by the police organization or by other officers working around this officer to accommodate their needs. For example, Participant D, Participant P, and Participant E stated:

*'If they want a quiet prayer area, we've always had quiet rooms or time out areas where people can go just to take that breath and put things into perspective . . . we've already got those areas, they can go and use that for their prayer room or whatever, like I don't think anything needs to change.'*

Participant D.

*'Fasting and stuff like that, it is an issue because . . . if all of a sudden, we've got . . . a much higher percentage of people with a certain need, then the organization has got to look at it and go okay, how do we address it.'*

Participant P.

*'If they're strictly adhering to religious guidelines and religious views and religious commitments, it might impact negatively on how the workplace is done, when I say negatively it would have to be managed, it wouldn't just flow, there'd have to be things put in place to manage their commitments to religion...'*

Participant E.

Whilst the third vignette was a hypothetical workplace injury situation, the ethnic and religious identity associated by the participants with the person in the imaginary scenario (Mohamed) garnered a lot of unprompted discussion in relation to recruitment strategies used by police organizations to encourage different people to enter policing. Many participants also openly stated that the police organization should limit the number of officers

from minority groups, and some participants spoke about the police organization having too many Muslim officers. For example, Participant O, Participant N, and Participant J said:

*'I suppose it comes back to how many Mohameds there are . . . '*

Participant O.

*'You have to be able to trust the person next to you 110% and if they don't fit into that culture, that could . . . ruin the whole unit . . . '*

Participant N.

*'They probably won't be accepted and won't be included in jobs.'*

Participant J.

When discussing the third vignette, some participants (assuming Mohamed's religion or religious practices) expressed their concern that increased numbers of Muslim officers in the police organization would mean that other officers (non-Muslim officers) were expected to compensate for their absence when Muslim officers take time away from work to pray or fast during specific times of the religious calendar. For example, Participant A and Participant S said:

*'You're balancing the needs and wants of an individual versus the needs and wants of the team, and I would argue a lot of people don't want equality, they want preferential treatment for certain people that they've decided are in need of that preferential treatment, so that's fine but at least label it correctly.'*

Participant A.

*'Why do we have to change everything just to suit those people . . . '*

Participant S.

It was interesting to note that whilst Case Study Three did involve an officer named Mohamed (whom the participants presumed was Muslim and from an ethnically diverse background, thereby associating him with a minority group identity rather than linking him with the majority group and 'Australian' culture), none of the participants spoke about their concerns regarding recruitment of officers from other minority groups or what it would mean if officers had to compensate for the absence of officers from other religions or whose cultural practices may also require them to have specific workplace needs or changes made to their workload. Some participants did express their concern regarding whether the specific needs required by minority group officers in the workplace are genuine or legitimate, and questioned whether officers from different ethnic groups were simply taking advantage of their circumstances and workplace policies to lessen their workload or avoid certain duties. Other participants talked about the problems of officers asking for special work-related circumstances or changes to workplace practices or rosters due to religious or cultural practices, since it could be seen as 'rotting the system', particularly because there is an expectation that upon joining the police, it is accepted as part of the workplace culture that the structural processes of policing and police work are meant to take precedence over the personal needs of all officers regardless of their background.

*'Because it's set breaks for praying, it might come across as being well . . . they're entitled to do that, so I'm entitled to go for my five walks a day, or my fifteen coffees a day.'*

Participant Q.

*'I suppose it can be unfair, so what is it, can't think of the term, what's the term that would reverse it . . . reverse racism.'*

Participant O.

In addition, whilst there is no mention of 'Mohamed's' linguistic abilities or his language competency or whether English is his native language, discussion of the third vignette also led many participants to express their frustration regarding working with officers who may not speak proficient English, and how this may impact on all members of the team,

particularly if the language barriers limit the capacity of the organization to manage its officers or the ability of officers to work as a proficient team. For example, Participant J and Participant R said:

*'If you can't communicate, if you don't have communication, whether it be verbal or written skills, if you don't have them, it doesn't matter what sex or race you are, then I don't think you should be accepted into the police.'*

Participant J.

*'If you've got people that come from non-English speaking backgrounds and they have a communication barrier, it makes it a little bit difficult to work in certain parts of the police . . . '*

Participant R.

Whilst officers from majority groups or non-ethnic minority groups with poor language skills or illiteracy were not mentioned as being problematic, some participants spoke specifically about ethnically diverse officers with poor language skills who are not expected to do the same tasks because of language deficiencies, which not only sets them apart from other officers when working in general duties policing but also has a negative impact on their reputation in the team since they are perceived as having an unfair advantage regarding workload. Many officers found this particularly frustrating and voiced their opinion regarding how they perceived officers from ethnic minority groups having an "expectation that their needs would be accommodated" (Participant J), when all people entering policing are informed of the type of work and duties that they are expected to cover. For example, Participant H and Participant A said:

*'Those people are taking advantage of systems, I'm not sure how other organisations work but definitely as police, everyone's 'rorting the system', and everyone's playing the card I think unfortunately . . . and I think when 'they' start wanting too much . . . and changes to suit themselves, we start to lose our own structure and culture . . . '*

Participant H.

*'I've worked with guys like that, they're very nice guys, well intentioned and all the rest of it but . . . you need to explain things to them because they just don't get it sometimes... and as long they're not just getting advantages because of their ethnicity I don't have a problem . . . '*

Participant A.

Participants also spoke about their frustration of working with ethnically diverse officers with poor language skills, because all applicants entering policing are tested on their English proficiency and are meant to meet certain benchmarks regarding recruitment criteria. After graduating from the police academy, however, many ethnically diverse officers with poor language skills are believed to be given special dispensation regarding policing duties and responsibilities. For example, Participant H said:

*'Yeah, my initial thoughts are that we've got someone that's gonna try and rort the system here with the non-English speaking, yeah, I shake my head when people aren't competent in speaking a fluent English language, like happy days, have the skills to speak in another language but be proficient in ours as well.'*

Participant H.

*'They're probably the wrong choice to make but it's just . . . unfortunately, it's just . . . something that you're used to . . . we tend to accommodate certain things too much . . . instead of sticking strong and saying, well, this is it, you know . . . but there are people that are taking advantage of systems . . . '*

Participant T.

### 3.4. Perceptions of Internal Workplace Advantage or 'Rotting the System'—When 'Diversity' Is Useful

Although much of the discussion regarding each of the hypothetical vignettes centred around many of the participants perceiving officers from diverse groups to purposefully use their identities to rot the system and take advantage of workplace policy or that police practices and workplace expectations are unfairly adjusted by the police organization and senior officers to meet the needs of diverse officers, some participants associated positive perceptions of diversity with policing practices and talked about officers from diverse groups being of benefit to the organization and their skills being useful depending on the context. For example, Participant T said:

*'They could be developed and up skilled or improved . . . if they've got the right attitude, I mean . . . certainly there's obviously people that are more competent, 'they' may not be as competent but can still get the work done or achieve the goals . . . certainly having people from different backgrounds can give you different perspectives, different skills . . . which can definitely help in investigations.'*

Participant T.

Many participants disclosed that they felt that diversity should be embraced but only when it is beneficial for the largest number of officers. Whilst many of the participants supported this notion, only a couple of participants spoke about the need for the police organization to reflect the multiculturalism of the community. For example, Participant N said:

*'I think as a police force, we should be a reflection of the community...'*

Participant N.

While most of the participants recognized that there are skills that diverse personnel could bring to the organization, these skills were only seen as positive when they enabled other police officers (from the majority group) to do their job. Many of the participants spoke about the skills that diverse officers could bring to the organization, but these were frequently perceived as 'useful add-ons' or additional skills or services that were beneficial in minor contexts of policing. When asked to describe the skills diverse individuals could bring to policing almost all the participants only mentioned diverse skills in the context of an officer being able to speak more than one language. For example, Participant H and Participant Q said:

*'I'm all for having people, different cultures in the cops . . . you'll be working on a job and a particular language comes up and you go, we need help here, and someone can come in straight away and speak it . . . '*

Participant H.

*'If they can speak multiple languages, helps with interpreting things, because the crooks can only get smarter . . . '*

Participant Q.

Many of the participants discussed the benefits of working with diverse officers from minority groups, but this perception was only discussed in relation to the benefits they perceived would arise when working with female officers, thereby identifying (and separating) female officers as a diverse group. For example, many of the participants talked about working with female officers in the workplace; however, their perception of working alongside female officers was underpinned by outdated notions that policing is predominantly male work, and that the presence of female officers would only make the workload of male officers easier or simply bring a 'balance' to the team but were not specific about what that meant, or the type of skills female officers could contribute. For example, Participant G, Participant S, and Participant T said:

*'There are jobs . . . without being sexist . . . that women 'can' do . . . we have a lady on our team, there are certain things that the five boys on our team can't do, but she will do every time . . . '*

Participant G.

*'The last three people that have come in our office have been female, it's been good because it's brought a balance around...'*

Participant S.

*'Women ... they bring a women's perspective, a different view on things, different personalities, I think it balances the team than just having Aussie guys in the team ... so I think it is of benefit...'*

Participant T.

Positive perceptions of officer's diversity were only expressed when the participants spoke about successful completion of jobs or outcomes in policing. While it was expressed by many of the participants that officers identified as diverse could help or assist non-diverse (majority group) officers, there was an underlying implication that diverse officers are not capable of working alone without the help of other non-diverse officers.

*'If you don't fit a specific view, you're kind of an outcast and you have to actually work double as hard to achieve something...'*

Participant L.

When asked to discuss how an officer's diversity could enhance policing many of the participants struggled to articulate how this could happen or identify specific areas where diversity could improve policing. Yet when the participants were able to articulate their perceptions of diversity in relation to the workplace it was frequently referred to in negative ways and many participants referred to Case Study 3 ('Mohamed') and spoke about diversity in relation to taking advantage of workplace policies and 'rorting the system'. Some of the participants expressed racist terminologies and prejudiced colloquial slang to stereotype and categorize officers from diverse groups, particularly in relation to Case Study 3 'Mohamed' and perceptions of workplace advantage. For example, Participant H said:

*'When I think of it ... I immediately think you've got typical "Leb back" here ... We've got the Middle Eastern male that wants to claim an injury'*

Participant H.

In Australian culture, the term 'Leb' is a racist derogatory shortened term (Australian offensive slang) used to describe someone from Lebanon or who is Lebanese [28]. The term 'Leb-back' is also a racist derogatory term used to describe an injury claim (typically a spinal injury) by a person who has not actually been injured. It is usually ascribed to people from Middle Eastern backgrounds under notions of preconceived bias regarding perceptions of laziness or the expectation that they will falsely claim an injury and 'rort' the system. When discussing each of the case studies, although some participants spoke briefly about diversity in positive ways, most of the participants perceived diversity as a problem that needs to be solved by police organizations since diversity is perceived negatively since it is perceived to give officers an 'unfair advantage' (Participant T) in being able to 'rort' the system or use workplace policies to change workload, responsibilities, and duties.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings suggest that the police detectives in this study have negative perceptions of diversity and associate diversity with an unfair advantage in the workplace. Diverse identified officers are seen as taking advantage of workplace policies and practices to reduce workload, responsibilities, and duties, or to increase leave from work. Police detectives in this research view diversity as an unfair advantage, which diverse officers can use to 'rort' the system regarding internal workplace practices.

When someone is accused of 'rorting the system' in a workplace, it can be linked to an employee being accused of falsifying information or using fraudulent means to obtain the greatest workplace (or work-related) benefit whilst seen to be remaining within

the operational practices espoused by the organization. ‘Rorting the system’ in these circumstances may occur when employees need to take special leave or require a reduction in workload due to extenuating circumstances or have special needs that may affect their employment or workload capacity. When an individual or group of people are seen to be ‘rorting the system’ to deliberately take advantage of internal workplace entitlements to the detriment of colleagues, the ramifications this has for the identity of the individual or groups in terms of the damage to their reputation may be unrepairable and may be ongoing [35]. Often assumptions are made, or behavioral stereotypes are associated with others having the same identity as being involved in similar practices and the danger they pose to the community [35]. This is especially problematic when individuals are perceived to be taking advantage of internal workplace practices which result in other employees being given additional duties or workload [11]. Negative assumptions and behavioral stereotypes in this context may further heighten the collective damage imposed on the identity of groups from diverse groups [36].

In Australia, research by Phillips [37] suggests that negative assumptions regarding social welfare fraud, stereotypes regarding anti-social behaviors, being deemed untrustworthy or sneaky, and being perceived to be taking advantage of policies or ‘rorting the system’ are negative associations frequently experienced by members of minority groups and people from diverse cultural or religious backgrounds. Perpetuated by fear of the ‘other’, minority group members are often stereotyped as lazy and perceived as a threat to safety and security as well as linked to public perceptions of fear of crime (see [1,38–40]). This is often reflected in negative perceptions of diverse people and workplace performance and workplace productivity [11]. In Australia, Miles–Johnson and Pickering [41], argue that historic and current perceptions of minority group members and diverse groups and associated lifestyles, are not based on notions of trustworthiness or perceptions of integrity, and as such, negative associations and misperceptions of antisocial behavior are frequently associated with minority group members in policing (and across societies), particularly in relation to misuse of social policy, internal workplace malpractice, and criminal behavior.

Research also suggests that working alongside, socializing with, or engaging with minority group members allows for the opportunity to revise negative stereotypes associated with diverse groups [27,35,36], but this can have the opposite effect when individuals or groups are unwilling to let go of negative stereotypes associated with perceptions of diversity and associate diversity with workplace advantage. On the other hand, having contact with others of a different race or ethnic group or religion or non-heteronormative sexuality or gender may cut down the reliance on exaggerated or incorrect stereotypes [3,27]. It may also improve intergroup relations, interracial perceptions, and improve the interaction between majority group and minority group members [27,35,42]. Although, the effect of this on internal workplace practices and how diversity shapes perceptions of employee advantage or disadvantage is still in need of further research.

Like many other nations, Australia has a very diverse population of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities as well as people with sexual and gender identities which do not conform to perceptions of heteronormative sexuality and gender performance [3,41]. Australia has experienced significant increases in minority populations over the last twenty years [27,43] and accordingly, police organizations across Australia have increased the numbers of officers from minority groups often through strategic recruitment drives or targeted employment. It is argued that as police organizations recruit from all groups in society, the existence of a single collective traditional cop culture and its associated values will have less of an impact on police practice externally as people from non-majority groups contribute diverse life experiences and cultural values to the role of policing and internally as police organizations rethink internal workplace guidelines, policy, and organizational practices [7,41,44].

As police organizations diversify, it is also argued that internal workplace practices based on traditional notions of police work (particularly those based on white–masculine heterosexual philosophies and practices) are expected to be replaced by less conventional



models and practices as police organizations reformulate strategic plans and operational guidelines to suit workplace practices in the modern world [11]. Research by Miles–Johnson [7,30], however, suggests that this philosophy is not being realized, with many police organizations not actually implementing workplace practices that will benefit diverse groups of people or create opportunities for diverse identified people that are not to give them an unfair advantage. This is problematic when police organizations are dominated by the recruitment of officers from majority groups [3].

As this research has shown, there is a connection that officers make between diversity and internal workplace advantage. Although the officers in the hypothetical vignettes are accessing workplace policies created for all officers (or are applying workplace policies specifically designed for diverse groups of people), the negative associations that police detectives make between diversity and ‘rotting the system’ suggest that it is the diverse identity of the officer which underpins the negative association. Whilst many internal workplace practices and support systems are designed to increase inclusivity in the workplace, some employees (such as the police detectives in this research) do not perceive them as fair. Yet the alternative to a lack of internal workplace support systems based on inclusivity which recognize diversity (and the specific needs relating to this) is workplace discrimination. For police organizations to overcome this issue, officer bias, as well as outdated notions of police work and police culture, needs to be addressed within the workplace. Lack of recognition of these issues has severe implications for police organizations regarding discrimination and differential treatment of employees. Fostering positive attitudes among all employees regarding the use of workplace practices, policies, and support systems, when appropriate, is vital, particularly if police organizations want to uphold workplace fairness and diminish negative associations between workplace advantage and diversity.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to ethics protocols.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A Case Studies Descriptions

### Case Study One

Amy joined the police three years ago and worked in general duties at a busy command. When Amy first started in the police, she attended a car accident where there were multiple fatalities. Amy is currently on maternity leave, and since having her child, she has been having frequent nightmares about the accident. Amy wants to negotiate her return to work as one day shift per week in general duties. Amy’s husband works as a senior engineer and earns a very good salary. Amy is keen to work ‘day’ shifts, as her husband is usually on night shifts so this will work well for daycare. Her superintendent has told her that she needs to work night shifts to go back on the general duties roster, as her team already has two part-time workers doing day shifts, and placing another person on day shift will mean the rest of her team works too many nights. He gives Amy the choice of working in exhibits on a day shift or working in general duties on a night shift. Neither of these options would be satisfying for Amy. As her return to work comes closer, Amy becomes increasingly stressed, with the nightmares becoming more frequent. She sees her

doctor, who tells her she is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. She reports this to her boss and extends her time off into sick leave.

#### Case Study Two

Sarah has been in the police for fifteen years and works in a crime squad as a detective senior constable. She has a reputation for making poor operational decisions, and sometimes has difficulties getting on with other members of her team. She has recently identified as being in a same-sex relationship with another police officer who works at another location. Sarah has noticed that when she enters the meal room, often the conversation stops or there is a change of subject, making her feel uncomfortable, but nobody has said or done anything inappropriate as far as she is aware. There have been a number of operational matters recently where her decisions were overridden by her supervisors, and she has not been offered the opportunity to relieve as a sergeant when officers junior to her have. Sarah is concerned that she is being discriminated against because she has identified as being gay and has mentioned this to other colleagues. Colleagues have started to avoid her because they are worried that they will say the wrong thing and she will make a complaint.

#### Case Study Three

Mohamed is forty-six years old and has been in the police for eight years. He is well regarded by his colleagues at his current station but has decided to move into a more tactical role. His fitness is excellent, and he already has Army Reserve experience in tactical operations. He applies for and passes the initial assessment to join a tactical operations unit but finds that other members of the unit leave him on the outer. A colleague tells him that other members are concerned about his age, but he has also heard an instructor comment that his background is a problem because it means he will not fit into the culture, in a place where loyalty and camaraderie are very important for getting the job done. During training, Mohamed sustains an injury that will require surgery, so he will take longer to pass the course. The instructor tells Mohamed that his age and injury are probably going to prevent him from passing, and that he should reconsider his application.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee approval number H11100.
- <sup>2</sup> In accordance with the ethics agreement the police organisation facilitated the research and dissemination of information regarding research participation.
- <sup>3</sup> A person who claims to have mental illness is known as playing the head noises card. It is generally thought not to be a legitimate claim.

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