

## EDITORIAL

### ‘Researching Diversity’

Susan Ressia and Shalene Werth

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The purpose of the researching diversity stream at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ) Conference, hosted by the Law School at the University of Adelaide, was to explore together the issues related to gender and other differences in contemporary workplaces. [The papers selected each fit with the overall conference theme ‘Jobs and changes in uncertain times’. They explain the difficulties experienced by different groups due to their identity \(Werth and Brownlow, 2018\). Uncertain times for different groups may be created by changes in technology, the broadly disadvantaging attitudes of society or, more specifically, by the disadvantaging attitudes of others in workplaces. We can look at these issues from a forward looking perspective or from an historical perspective.](#) In particular, the aim was to gain a more nuanced understanding of the issues as experienced by individuals, who may or may not exhibit difference. Visible and invisible identities can provoke particular reactions from colleagues when they are disclosed. Individuals who exhibit difference, for example, in their health status, migrant or racial background, gender, age or sexuality, risk being stigmatised or stereotyped in the labour market. Goffman shows that individuals with stigmatising attributes are ‘very careful to show that in spite of appearances they are very sane, very generous, very sober, very masculine [or feminine]... in short they are... nice persons like ourselves in spite of the reputation of their kind’ (1986, p. 110).

Socially advocated ‘codes of conduct provide the stigmatised individual... with recipes for an appropriate attitude regarding the self’ (Goffman 1986, p. 110). Where individuals have an invisible stigmatising identity they might have a choice about disclosure and attempt to appear ‘normal’. Normality ‘designates the state of affairs where everyone can get on with their business and the taken-for-granted world is not visibly shaken’ (Pinder 1995, p. 210). In the work environment there is an expectation of ‘normality’ that may exclude diversity groups, resulting in their experiences of less desirable workforce outcomes. These outcomes can be

experienced in different and complex ways, when multiple visible and/or visible identities intersect. Thus, as Crenshaw (1989) describes, the intersection of various characteristics work in ways to produce inequalities and disadvantage for people who do not fit the dominant norm.

Twenty-four submissions were received, which set the scene for a stream that was robust in its coverage of gender, youth, disability and migrant issues, not only in the Australian context, but also inclusive of the same issues faced within neighbouring nations. Collectively, the papers covered a broad range of issues affecting diverse groups in local and international labour markets, including focus on regulatory and policy issues, workplace rights, the future of work, job insecurity, gender inequality, skills wastage, recognition of and support for workers with a disability, and youth unemployment. We have selected four papers that speak to these issues [and which highlight the specific issues associated with perceptions of difference in the workplace. in this special issue of the Journal of Labour and Industry, which have been selected from the papers presented in this stream.](#)

We begin by introducing an article from Roslyn Cameron and Farveh Farivar titled ‘The Unanticipated Road to Skills Wastage for Skilled Migrants: the Non-recognition of Overseas Qualifications and Experience’ who tackle the issue of the recognition of skilled migrants’ overseas qualifications and experience. This is a very important and topical issue, as migrants may experience the unrecognition of their credentials in achieving employment that is equivalent to what is held in their home country. The unrecognition of skills leads to issues of skills wastage in the Australian labour market, and/or can further the potential exploitation of migrant workers, particularly those who are from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). While economic losses result from the under-recognition of qualifications, skills and experiences, this also leads to personal costs for individual skilled migrants and their families. The aim of the paper is to analyse the recognition of overseas qualifications and experiences (ROQE) process and explore the issues that are faced by skilled migrants through the theoretical lens of human capital theory. [This will,](#)~~to~~ aid explanation surrounding the unintended employment expectations, experiences and outcomes for skilled migrants entering Australia. ~~They~~[The authors](#) argue that in this light the policy rhetoric surrounding the need for skilled migrant workers to fill recognised skill gaps does not match the reality that this group [might](#) experiences in terms of downward occupational mobility (Ressia, Strachan & Bailey, 2017) and other barriers that may ~~present that~~ aid in such outcomes. [Examples of these might include for example a](#) lack of local work experience, discrimination, language skills,

knowledge of local labour markets, and professional regulations. Secondly, the authors apply a further theoretical lens where they undertake a critical analysis of knowledge hierarchies in order to explore the operationalisation of ROQE in terms of underlying power relations and how they may be enacted in this context. They look at six lines of enquiry from Harris's (2000) knowledge boundaries and boundary-work conceptual framework to explore this further within the context of ROQE.

Cameron and Farivar tackle the issue of skill recognition by examining ROQE and the recognition of both *formal* qualifications and *non-formal* work experience that was gained overseas, which, as the authors argue, can work in ways that can affect the mobility of skilled professional migrants. They also examine how mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) can provide solutions to the issue of downward occupational mobility and associated impacts faced by professional skilled migrants and thus, as they describe, may work towards 'loosening... the mobility straightjacket' faced by skilled migrants. In order to answer their question of '*Do independent skilled migrants obtain employment in the host country commensurate with their overseas obtained qualifications and experience?*', data was collected through a web-based survey (n = 508) and 14 in-depth interviews of skilled migrants living in Western Australia. The study highlights the issues faced by these new migrants and their employment outcomes, including skill underutilisation, and the article suggests that additional resources in the form of specialised information kits would go some way towards assisting job seeking, skill recognition and understanding of local labour market conditions, regulations and laws in Australia. Cameron and Farivar conclude by suggesting that while barriers do persist for skilled professional migrants, the involvement of MRAs and the involvement of professional bodies, educational institutions and government can circumvent outcomes of downward occupational mobility. The recommendation of information kits at different stages of the migration process may also aid in the transition to better employment outcomes, and thus may assist in narrowing the gap between policy rhetoric and positive employment outcomes in the future.

Following on from Cameron and Farivar's work is the article by Tranfaglia, Campbell, Tham and Boese titled 'Precarious Work and the Reluctance to Complain: Italian Temporary Migrant Workers in Australia'. Again, an article focusing on the difficulties experienced by migrants in the Australian labour market, with particular focus on workplace rights and the treatment of temporary migrant workers. The authors highlight the issues that have risen to prominent attention as a result of recent scandals involving well-known franchise organisations in

Australia and the issue of non-compliance (Clibborn and Wright 2018; Rawling and Schofield-Georgeson 2017). The authors raise themes including the prevalence of precarious work, wage-theft, co-ethnic exploitation and the vulnerability of temporary migrant workers, and undertake qualitative research in an attempt to provide answers to the ‘puzzle’ that presents in the form of “TMW ‘tolerance’ (Clibborn, 2018) or ‘acquiescence’ (Campbell, et al 2016)” to the underpayment of wages in food services and farm work.

In order to understand, from an individual perspective, why there is a reluctance to make a formal complaints about underpayment, 15 in-depth interviews were undertaken with Melbourne-based Italian temporary migrant workers (TMWs). Insights from farm workers revealed pay that was below minimum wage requirements, as well as evidence of sexual harassment for female workers. Workers in food services were also subject to the underpayment of wages. The authors further analysed their interview data, using a four-fold classification schema (based on a similar seven-fold schema developed by Farbenblum & Berg (2018)), to identify the reasons why individuals did not choose to take action. The four-fold schema comprises of: 1) active complicity; 2) time and effort inefficiency; 3) fear of employer reprisals; and 4) relative insignificance of low pay. While little support was found for categories 1 and 2, category 3 was strongly supported, with many participants reporting fear of punishment for speaking up, and said they would be likely to lose shifts or their job. Others reported having to pay money back to their employer, or put up with these conditions to meet visa renewal requirements. The authors found that as many of the Italian TMWs felt that their jobs were casual and were only short term, the issues of low pay as (per Category 4), was downplayed. It appears that the group was playing a longer-game strategy that would eventually lead them to securing more permanent forms of work once visa requirements were met. Thus, TMWs focused on potential future career expectations in professional permanent jobs, and as such the authors describe their current predicament as ‘only a transient form of frustration’ that forms a small part of the ‘broader life-course projects’ for these workers.

Moving away from the focus of vulnerable migrant workers, ~~the next~~ article by Cathy Brigden ‘Voice and agency: workers with a disability and trade unionism’ explores the historical relationship that workers with disability have experienced over time with the union movement. This article examines both vision impaired workers and to a lesser extent, workers with other physical disabilities. Historically, workers with disability have accessed increased levels of workplace power by organising collectively. The author highlights the key workplace

experiences of people with vision impairment and other types of disability and the manner in which they used separate organising, agency and voice to address these issues. This paper notes that blind workers agitated for improved conditions at work and instigated union organising from the late 1800s and throughout the early years of the 1900s. Society's attitudes towards people with disability was patronising at best. Reference was made to way they appeared, and surprise was expressed at their ability to undertake work that was not previously considered to be suitable for workers with disability. Brigden highlights that despite the disabling effects of the social attitudes of the time, workers with disability made an effort to organise using 'separate organising'. They developed links with the Australian Council of Trade Unions and various Trade Halls and improved their power in their fight for workplace rights and improved conditions of work.

Disability is a complex identity to have, and it may 'impact on every other identity category at any time' (Mitchell & Snyder 2000:x). However, its influence on the working conditions of workplaces where people with vision impairment were employed, such as the Victorian Asylum and School for the Blind, was considerable. Workers sometimes took great risks in continuing to agitate for change, including the threat that their institution could be closed. Disclosure of a disability was a risky proposition and for many there may have been a preference to not disclose in the public sphere which was important for these workers to achieve their collective goals. The types of attitudes held by the Australian public were reflected in a Western Australian newspaper reporting on a Blind Men's Union in Italy as 'a novel, though somewhat pathetic, departure in the way of labor agitation was witnessed' (*Daily News* 21 March 1903: 8). The concept of being willing to agitate for change, despite the vulnerabilities associated with being outed in the public sphere, is one that we see workers relate to today (Vickers 2010). The concept of the achievement of fairness in the workplace was made clear when the blind workers stated that they required the same amount of money to survive even though they had a disability. This was in discussions at a meeting with interstate unions where the importance of a minimum wage was highlighted.

Society often attempts to decide on what work is appropriate for people who have disclosed a disability, in some cases employers attempt to sideline workers who are perceived to be different. Workers with disability may choose to use agency to improve their working outcomes. Hay defines agency as 'the intentional and motivated capacity to act' (2010, p. 260). Individuals with disability may find themselves in situations where they need to be intentional

about their behaviours in order to present themselves as ‘capable’. Agency plays a pivotal role in the process of preserving appearances and it forms part of building an appearance of capability or normality when there may seem to be evidence to the contrary. The author cites examples where blind workers were regarded as ‘useless’, were called ‘sightless orbs’, and were described as a picture of ‘infinite pathos’ and providing a ‘pathetic touch’, also men with wooden legs were referred to as ‘peglegs’. The stigma of these disabilities is embedded in the language used to describe these workers.

Agency becomes an important part of the work undertaken by those with disability when acting collectively for workplace gains but additionally to overcome pre-existing stigma associated with their disability. Bandura expands this concept further and adds that ‘people conceive of ends and work purposefully to achieve them. They are agents of experiences, not just undergoers of experiences’ (Bandura 2006, p. 168). Acting as agents in representing themselves allows workers to manage the way they are perceived by others and provides a means for them to achieve their collective goals. It is useful, as we, as a society, attempt to move away from the ‘diversity as difference’ paradigm and towards ‘inclusion’ as an overarching paradigm in workplaces, to examine the effort that workers with disabilities historically undertook in order to act collectively. The concepts of collective voice, agency and stigma are valuable in discussions relating to collective activity, but perhaps more so when the difficulties endured by workers with disabilities were so socially ingrained. At times, we see similar attitudes persisting in modern workplaces.

Finally, in the article presented by David Peetz and Georgina Murray, gender is examined in relation to the future of work. Three questions are covered in this paper, these are: Are women likely to lose their jobs through future changes in the labour market? Will automation and artificial intelligence be costlier for women than for men? And, are trends likely to reduce or increase gender segregation of employment and skills in the labour market? The analysis of historical data and projections for the Australian and US labour markets found that women were not likely to be particularly disadvantaged by technological change or other structural changes in the labour market. In fact women’s jobs are slightly more secure than men’s. It was also found that there has already been, and is expected that there will continue to be, an improvement in the skill levels of jobs held by women. This is linked to the growth in the aged care and disability care sectors. The authors highlight the significance in the analysis is in what

the numbers do not show. They explain that the impact on women's employment is limited to specific occupations or industries and does not appear to be generalised.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the stream was to expand into the broader field of diversity, and reflect today's social and cultural environments where we are witnessing rapid change and transformation in the diverse nature of the workforce. While the workforce issues pertaining to these groups have often been unacknowledged, misunderstood, overlooked or ignored, we are encouraged by such robust discussion within the field of industrial relations and we acknowledge all of you who continue to make important contributions in this growing area of our discipline. From this, we see that such insightful research and dialogue will continue, and we encourage ongoing opportunities for discussion and debate at future AIRAANZ conferences and for conversations to continue to remain within our own journal.

### **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

### **Notes on Contributors**

Dr Susan Ressia, Lecturer, Griffith Business School, Griffith University  
([s.ressia@griffith.edu.au](mailto:s.ressia@griffith.edu.au))

Dr Shalene Werth, Senior lecturer, School of Management and Enterprise, USQ  
([shalene.werth@usq.edu.au](mailto:shalene.werth@usq.edu.au))

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