

Article

Inclusion Capital: How Police Officers Are Included in Their Workplaces

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Abstract: Policing organisations are increasingly expected to be representative of the diversity (e.g., gender, sexuality, ethnicity and religion) in the communities they serve. However, inclusion of these officers in the workplace often requires them to fit into prevailing police culture, meaning that the cultural changes expected in association with increased diversity are not achieved as readily in police organisations. Drawing upon semi-structured interviews with twenty police detectives, in this article, I assert that there are three core characteristics required of police officers needed to promote inclusion and acceptance in their workplace, regardless of their diversity status. These characteristics are cultural congruence, competence and team-player ability—together known as ‘inclusion capital’. The definitions of these three inclusion capital characteristics are shaped by the prevailing police culture and organisational policy and are subject to change. An individual officer’s understanding and ability to prove these three characteristics are reflected in how well they are included and accepted amongst their colleagues. This paper contributes to previous findings on police culture using Bourdieu’s theories of ‘capital’ in a new way to explain how and why police are included in their workplace. It also describes how these findings might be used by police managers to improve workplace inclusion for all minoritised officers.

Keywords: policing; police culture; diversity; workplace; inclusion; capital; Bourdieu; grounded theory



Citation: Linklater, K. Inclusion Capital: How Police Officers Are Included in Their Workplaces. *Societies* **2022**, *12*, 128. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12050128>

Academic Editor: Gregor Wolbring

Received: 18 July 2022

Accepted: 8 September 2022

Published: 13 September 2022

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1. Introduction

In keeping with a broader global movement to increase diversity and inclusion in employment, policing organisations are under pressure to increase diversity in their workforces to make them representative of the communities they police. Employing more women, more people from minoritised ethnic and religious groups, more genders and more people with diverse abilities is posited as a positive step to ensure that police organisations meet societal expectations relating to diversity. However, diversity does not always mean inclusion in police workplaces, as ‘being there is not the same as being heard’ [1] (p. 182). In other words, officers from minoritised groups still need to navigate police culture to feel included, and this does not always mean embracing their own minority status. In addition, it does not mean that their presence will necessarily have the effect of changing police culture in ways that are desired. Essentially, increasing diversity in police organisations comes with a moral imperative to ensure that diversity is embraced, although pervasive police culture can prevent this from occurring.

Sir Robert Peel’s maxim of ‘the police are the public and the public are the police’ (cited in [2] (p. 100)) is often invoked as one of the reasons why police diversity should be increased. Whereas diversity may not have been the central premise of this statement at the time it was made, current societal expectations do require police forces to be more representative of the communities they serve [3]. In addition, it has been argued that increasing all kinds of diversity is beneficial both from a human rights perspective [4] and a business perspective [5]. As a human right, equal opportunity in employment is just one reason why all individuals, regardless of diversity status, should be afforded the

opportunity to become a police officer. For police organisations, the business perspective implies that greater diversity will result in better outcomes in working with different communities [6–9], as well as providing the organisation with alternate ideas to solve future problems that cannot be resolved with conventional thinking [10] and improving operational effectiveness [11]. In this paper, it is premised that a diverse workforce is important to ensure that police organisations are equipped to do their job effectively and fairly.

1.1. Police Diversity

Research on police diversity tends to focus on categories of diversity, with women, ethnic minorities and sexual minorities the most prevalent in the literature. This categorised approach allows for knowledge about diverse identities to be teased out, as each category has specific needs. Furthermore, the benefits that might be contributed by each category of diversity to the organisation can differ. For example, recruitment of minoritised ethnic police is seen as an avenue for engaging with minoritised ethnic communities [12,13], increasing the numbers of women is believed to be a way to change police culture and provide a better workforce [14,15], and increasing the number of Muslim officers is believed to help in combatting terrorism [8]. These arguments all support the business case for increased police diversity. It should also be noted that the term ‘diverse’ should only be used where there is a ‘norm’ or ‘typical’ officer. In the organisation subject to this research, the norm or typical police officer is a white, heterosexual male.

The experiences of women police officers are the most prevalent in the literature, with their journey often described in terms of structural barriers and masculine police culture that are difficult to shift [9]. For instance, the structural barrier regarding the physical requirements of officers initially excluded women from recruitment (and acceptance) in policing. However, as physical requirements were met by more women, the resistance regarding employment of female police officers shifted from physical competencies to their commitment to their job in light of childcare and other family requirements [16,17], which represents another structural barrier. Masculine police culture, which will be discussed below, is also referenced in the literature as a barrier to women being included in the workplace [18,19].

Whereas structural barriers predominantly affect women, cultural issues are mentioned more often in the literature about officers from minoritised ethnic groups, with perceptions of a racist culture amongst police representing a significant barrier to the recruitment of minoritised ethnic officers across the globe [20–24]. In addition, studies have indicated that trust has been an issue between officers with a white identity and officers with a minoritised ethnic identity [14,25]. As such, a perception of racist culture is a recruitment barrier for officers from different ethnic or religious minority backgrounds.

This lack of trust has also been reported for Muslim officers, exacerbated by the focus on Islamic terrorism and subsequent negative dealings between Muslim communities and the police [6]. These tensions between Muslim communities and police organisations create a further barrier to Muslim officers being recruited and retained.

Acceptance of LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) police officers has increased over time because homosexuality has been broadly decriminalised; however, similarly to the acceptance of women in policing, there is a stronger likelihood that LGB officers will be included if they fit in to the masculine police culture [26–28]. In addition, the homosexuality of officers tends not to be an issue when the officer has demonstrated that they are professional with a good work ethic [29,30]. As such, LGB police officers are accepted in the workplace, provided they fit with the prevailing heteronormative culture of the organisation.

1.2. Police Culture

Police culture has been extensively studied, described and critiqued globally, often with negative connotations [31]. Across policing literature, police culture has been described as masculine [32,33], racist [7,34], enduring [35,36], changing as a result of societal

expectations [37], made up of multiple cultures [38–40] and a culture that overrides other cultures when an officer joins [41]. Some scholars argue that police culture is negative and requires change [7], whereas others attribute negative aspects of police culture to the difficult nature of police work [31,42]. Regardless of these varied, complex and sometimes contradictory definitions, increasing diversity and inclusion in policing organisations cannot be considered without some understanding of police culture.

The assertion that police culture is masculine has been made throughout the literature, linking masculine culture with perceptions about what ‘important’ police work is. This includes prioritising operational rather than community policing [37], requiring particular physical traits [32,33] and seeing bravado and tough responses by police as the ideal [43]. Whereas descriptions of police culture as masculine are widely accepted, the notion of police culture having one ‘masculinity’ has been disputed, as some authors question whether masculine police culture should be described through a hegemonic masculinity lens [44]. Rather, masculine police culture, as well as police culture in general, might be described as multifaceted, as per assertions made in various contexts in other police culture literature (see [38–40]). Therefore, it is also open to the perception and subjectivity of the individual and their own experience, although similarities are often found.

Female officers are a relatively new addition to policing [45], so assertions of a masculine culture are perhaps not surprising. Whether there are multiple masculine cultures or one, masculine culture in policing has contributed to women’s experiences as officers because they are subjected to unwanted sexual harassment and sexualised banter [46–50]. This leads them to make difficult decisions about whether to report poor behaviour or to just accept it, as reporting poor behaviour can leave them on the outer. This reluctance to report poor behaviour is also asserted in the literature about minoritised ethnic police officers, as the culture has also been described as racist (see [7,34]), albeit with a reduction in overt racism over time [51].

Whereas racist police culture is usually linked to racism toward community members, it has also been posited that within policing organisations, officers of minoritised ethnic status are required to prove themselves in order to be included [13,52]. As such, minoritised ethnic officers will tolerate racist behaviour to ensure an easier transition into the workplace [25]. Similar to female officers’ perceptions and experiences of masculine police culture, whether an officer identified as being of minoritised ethnic or racial status perceives conversation and behaviour as racist will depend on individual perceptions and their ability to fit in [41].

It has been asserted that an officer being racist does not necessarily mean that they will engage in racist behaviour toward community members [31,37]. Rather, they may speak in a racist way while around other officers, but when dealing with community members, they may conduct themselves fairly. This assertion is disputed in multiple forums, especially following the Macpherson Report [53] in the United Kingdom [54] and the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States [55]. For example, in Australia, there is a significant history of Aboriginal people being disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system compared to the rest of the population (see [56]). However, one study of Aboriginal women police officers in Australia found that systemic racial or sexual discrimination was not widely reported [57], meaning that this racism may be perceived and experienced more acutely by community members than by Aboriginal officers themselves. Further research is needed in this space regarding experiences of police officers from different minoritised ethnic and religious groups, including their own perceptions of racist police culture.

Given that police officers from minoritised groups often change their behaviour to fit the norm (see [12,14,27,58]), increasing diversity may not necessarily change police culture because minoritised officers are likely to conform to the prevailing culture. This creates a quandary regarding cultural change and how to encourage all officers to celebrate and appreciate everyone’s characteristics of diversity to ensure that these characteristics are of benefit to the police organisation and the community and to ensure that all officers are comfortable to be themselves at work. It has been argued that an individual’s attitude may

be more important than their diversity characteristics [22,59], meaning that the officer's ability to accept the diversity of others (regardless of their own diversity status) could have a greater impact than increasing diversity in itself.

Interestingly, police organisational policies are often designed with cultural change in mind [7], although it has been stated that societal expectations are likely to have a greater effect on changing police culture [37]. Whereas some authors comment that police culture is enduring [36], it might be said that this is in relation to specific aspects of police culture, such as loyalty. The question is not whether police cultural change is possible but which factors make it possible and what is the best way to instigate change. Difficulties in implementing cultural change through policy have been connected with enduring cultural knowledge [60,61] because police officers have been found to have their own ways of keeping cultural practices [62]. However, changing policies does not always translate to a change in behaviour [27,37]. When societal expectations create change in police organisations, this is likely to have greater effect within the organisation [37]. Ideally, policy changes would be in line with societal expectations, meaning that both contribute to a positive and meaningful impact on police culture. This needs to be driven by the organisation in a way that carefully considers prevailing culture, depending on the circumstances of the organisation rather than targeting inclusion strategies to any one diversity category [63,64].

Whereas police diversity literature categorises officers into groups with respect to diversity status, this may not be the best approach for policy implementation to increase inclusion. For example, research suggests some police officers feel that minoritised officers are gaining a workplace advantage when they use a policy designed to assist them [65]. As such, it is reasonable to suggest that a holistic approach to diversity is required to ensure inclusion in police workplaces. This is not to say that entitlements should be taken away from minoritised officers, but a more nuanced approach is needed to ensure a perception of fairness, as well as fairness in practice [65]. It also means that as further categories of diversity are discovered, policy should be designed to facilitate the needs of these categories without increasing levels of bureaucracy.

It is also argued that a different managerial approach to diversity is needed, taking into account the effects of policy and police culture on inclusion for the individual within that organisation's unique context. Whereas police culture has a significant effect on an officer's inclusion, it is not the only factor. To explain this further, Bourdieu's [66] theories of habitus, field and capital were used in this research.

1.3. Bourdieu's Social Theory and Police Culture

Bourdieu [66] theorised that the social world could be described using several concepts that are intrinsically linked and complex, and his work relates closely to the ways in which police culture works in practice. Therefore, the findings of this research build on Bourdieu's theories of habitus, field and, in particular, capital [66] as an explanation of what police officers intrinsically need to be included in their workplace. Although described separately, the three concepts (habitus, field and capital) interact with each other constantly to make up the social world, and they are each continually reproduced over time unless a significant change is made to one of them.

According to Bourdieu [67,68], 'habitus' refers to an individual's understanding of how the social world works. Throughout life, an individual is exposed to their own unique experiences, resulting in their own personal perceptions of external structures and systems; these structures and systems are known as 'fields'. When an individual accepts their own personal understanding (habitus), change is difficult to implement because they cannot see a reason for change [68,69]. In other words, when individuals believe that the social world is how it should be, without challenging their own understanding, they are less likely to embrace change. In the context of police officers who fit into police culture, those who do not challenge their own habitus are likely to accept and replicate the culture, meaning that

police cultural change will not come easily. This is referred to as ‘doxa’ [66] and will be discussed further below.

‘Field’ refers to the rules and structures of institutions and hierarchies [70], meaning that the structures and rules of a policing organisation are part of the field. For instance, formal policies and procedures surrounding recruitment, promotion and retention of police officers are part of the field, although this term might also be applied to the more informal field of police culture.

Fields are organised around ‘capital’, so officers with high levels of capital tend to occupy higher positions in the field. ‘Capital’ can be described as anything an individual possesses that is valuable within the field, and this ‘capital’ contributes to how much power each individual has [71]. Bourdieu [71] described the main types of capital (economic, cultural and social) but reasoned that there are other types of capital. Those with higher levels of capital have more power; therefore, they are in a better position to shape the field. Using capital, they can choose to replicate power structures or to change them, depending on what they believe is necessary as part of their habitus (or beliefs). This means that those with power can replicate the structures that allowed them to gain power and capital in the first place [72,73]. In effect, those with the most power are able to keep their power by ensuring that structures do not change in a way that takes away their power. Of course, they may also choose to use their power to assist in change processes.

As previously stated, Bourdieu [71] described different types of capital, including economic, cultural and social capital, each with a different part to play in the social world. For the current research, the additional concept of ‘inclusion capital’ was applied; that is, there are certain elements required of a police officer to ensure their inclusion amongst colleagues in the workplace. It should be noted that in this research, having higher levels of inclusion capital (or power) does not necessarily equate to a higher police rank—it is linked more to inclusion and influence over others in the workplace. As such, the habitus (or beliefs) of a person with high levels of inclusion capital are important because they have the potential to shape the field (or in this case, inclusion culture) of the organisation.

Whereas knowledge regarding how police officers are included in their workplace is important, it is asserted that this knowledge can be used to implement positive change in policing organisations. This can be done under the premise that individuals are more likely to change when they can see that the change is required and appropriate. Another concept described by Bourdieu [66] is ‘doxa’—when an individual accepts their social world as the way it should be rather than questioning whether change is required. If an individual has ‘doxa’, they will continue to replicate the same field (or structure), and if that individual has a high level of capital (or power), they are in a better position to ensure this replication continues [74]. When referring to inclusive practice in police organisations, doxa occurs when police officers accept the status quo of their organisational culture without question. If an individual has high levels of capital and they also have doxa, they are unlikely to readily engage in any cultural change processes [75,76]. This makes cultural change harder to implement through a top-down management approach because the officers being asked to change cannot see any reason to do so. Furthermore, they may resist the change or find ways around it. However, it has been asserted that habitus can be changed through reflexivity [77,78], meaning that doxa does not always continue in an individual. Conversely, change is not always necessary, and encouraging reflexivity allows police managers to consider this carefully before change implementation programs are put in place [79].

1.4. Research Contribution

The findings presented in this paper contribute to knowledge about police culture by articulating the ways in which police officers are included in their workplaces, regardless of diversity status. This is in keeping with previous scholarly assertions that differences do not always correlate with background characteristics [80,81] and provides an explanation of why some minoritised officers are accepted and included whereas others are not. A descrip-

tion of how the individual inclusion process takes place in one large police organisation in Australia will be provided, along with an outline of how this information can be used as a holistic approach to diversity policy formulation and analysis, thereby encouraging increased inclusion.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Theoretical Approach

The research was conducted using constructivist grounded theory methods. In contrast to more traditional social research, grounded theory research is conducted by collecting and analysing data prior to making hypotheses, with theory arising throughout or after the data analysis process [82]. Grounded theory is commonly used in practice-based professions [83], with the founders of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss, asserting that ‘practical applications—predictions and explanation should be able to give the practitioner understanding and some control of situations’ (cited in [84] (p. 24)). For this research, this practitioner-based approach has been applied to policing.

Grounded theory was initially proposed within a positivist approach (and some researchers still apply it this way), but over time, it was argued that a constructivist approach was also required [85]. Constructivism requires the researcher to acknowledge and take into account the ways in which individual realities are constructed through both social and individual means [86]. For example, an individual police officer may come to an organisation with their own beliefs and understandings of reality, but these may change over time as they become more familiar with organisational culture. Alternately, their individual understanding may remain completely distinct from organisational understandings.

Constructivist grounded theory allows for the researcher’s experiences to be included in the research rather than an expectation that they will be completely objective [87]. The researcher must also acknowledge that they bring their own level of knowledge to the data analysis process. This is especially important for social researchers who are also practitioners, as an entirely objective approach cannot be claimed. Therefore, as the researcher of the current study was a serving police officer at the time of the research, constructivist grounded theory was deemed the most appropriate. It is acknowledged that the researcher added knowledge to the data [88] while maintaining a reflexive approach [89] to coding and analysis.

2.2. Participant Recruitment

Participants were initially recruited via an email sent to officers within a large command of police detectives. Participants were from a range of backgrounds, including white heterosexual male officers who fit the ‘norm’, various minoritised ethnic groups and women. During the first round of interviews, snowball sampling was used to recruit additional participants. Targeted sampling based on data analysis was also used to recruit police officers from specific minoritised groups, such as Muslim officers. Targeted sampling was attempted for LGB participants, however this was unsuccessful. All participants were police detectives ranging in rank from Detective Senior Constable to Detective Inspector. Prior to interviews, all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, with signed consent forms obtained in accordance with Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval: H11100.

2.3. Data Collection

In total, forty semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty sworn police detectives, as each participant was interviewed twice. Three fictional vignettes about three police officers with varying diversity characteristics were presented to each participant during their first interview. These vignettes referred to a female general duties officer on maternity leave who had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, a female detective who was perceived by colleagues as low in competence and had just disclosed to colleagues that she was in a same-sex relationship and a male officer with a Muslim

name who was training to become a tactical operative. Interview participants were asked to read each vignette and answer the same series of open-ended questions about their initial reaction and the main issues they felt were raised, as well as how they felt colleagues and managers would react to the scenario. Key points were probed further as they were discovered.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analysed through constant comparative analysis, whereby initial incidents in the data are coded and then formed into categories. In constant comparative analysis, as additional data are collected, they are compared with previous codes and categories. This process is ongoing throughout the data collection process, with the aim of generating a theory that arises from the data [90].

Initial interviews were transcribed and coded line by line upon completion, resulting in several categories. When theoretical saturation or repetition categories occurred with no new categories arising, the first round of interviews was completed. The categories were formed into a set of hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 1. *Police officers are accepted by their colleagues through fitting into the culture or through a perception of competence of both.*

Hypothesis 2. *Police officers perceive difference and diversity as a problem to be solved rather than a benefit to the organisation.*

Hypothesis 3. *Muslim officers are regarded with a greater level of suspicion than other officers.*

Hypothesis 4. *A disconnect exists between officers' understandings of official policy on diversity and the belief systems and practice displayed by those officers.*

These initial hypotheses were then tested in the second round of semi-structured interviews using more targeted questions with the same participants. A further hypothesis was identified during this set of interviews, as constant data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process:

Hypothesis 5. *Police officers perceive diversity initiatives in the organisation to be somewhat unfair.*

The transcripts of this second round of interviews were also coded line by line, with the hypotheses being further analysed through constant comparative analyses in accordance with grounded theory methods [90]. This analysis resulted in three clear elements required of police officers if they are to be included in their workplace. These elements were named 'inclusion capital' elements and will be discussed in the Results section. With the knowledge of the three inclusion capital elements, further analysis was conducted of all data relating to participants' understanding of organisational policy, especially relating to Hypothesis 5, as it was a newer hypothesis. A theory was then developed with respect to how to use these inclusion capital elements to guide the enhancement and development of inclusion and diversity policies and strategies.

2.5. Methodological Limitations

Whereas this study speaks to the importance of inclusion capital in relation to diversity and inclusion in policing, there are some methodological limitations that should be considered. In terms of the generalisability of the findings, the limited sample size of twenty detectives cannot be generalised to the larger organisation or in relation to other Australian police organisations. Furthermore, not all minoritised groups were represented in the interview cohort or the case studies. In particular, there were no Aboriginal participants, and they were not mentioned in the case studies. As such, Aboriginal police officers should be a focus of future research in this space. Whereas there were no LGB participants, their

experiences were discussed by participants. It is also acknowledged that further research is required to confirm the effectiveness of changing policy in line with the inclusion capital elements. Future research could also focus on other police organisations and their own definitions of inclusion capital, as well as whether implementing policy change based on known inclusion capital elements has a significant impact on inclusion for all officers.

3. Results

3.1. Inclusion Capital

The findings of this research draw heavily on and add to Bourdieu's [66,71] theory of social and cultural capital by first describing the traits and characteristics that police officers must demonstrate and maintain amongst their colleagues to be included in the workplace. The traits and characteristics outlined here are called 'inclusion capital'. Whereas Bourdieu [71] gave broad definitions regarding what constitutes social and cultural capital, the inclusion capital elements in this study are defined specifically for the organisation and cohort studied in this research.

In keeping with Bourdieu's [66] theory that individuals with large amounts of capital have more power, the findings presented here are that officers with large amounts of inclusion capital are more included and accepted amongst colleagues. Conversely, officers who are unable to gain or maintain inclusion capital do not feel included in the workplace, and other officers do not see them as an integral part of their work group. In the cohort included in this study, three inclusion capital elements were identified: cultural congruence, competence, and team-player ability.

3.1.1. Having Cultural Congruence as an Inclusion Capital Element

An officer with cultural congruence fits into the informal, social side of police culture. Cultural congruence is closely aligned with the traditional notion of 'police culture', as described elsewhere in policing literature (for examples, see [7,31,37,91]), albeit with some differences. In essence, having cultural congruence means an officer takes part in or, at the very least, accepts workplace social norms. For example, participants described officers who demonstrated cultural congruence as participating in the 'boys' club', passing the 'attitude test' by accepting the status quo of the prevailing culture and changing to conform to the culture if they did not naturally fit in.

Participating in the boys' club requires an officer to be part of a masculinised workplace, including drinking alcohol and taking part in workplace banter. The boys' club is characterised in other literature in terms of a clique in which masculine behaviour is required to fit in to the team [92,93]; this concept was confirmed in this research:

'My initial response to fit into the cops, I think male, I think young, I think gym junkie¹, I think a bit of a boys' club, bit of a drinker ... '

Participant 2

'He doesn't fit into the culture, maybe that's because he doesn't booze, maybe he doesn't cheat on his wife, maybe he doesn't participate in childish behaviour that people find amusing, maybe that's not how he fits into that little group of people that just want to get really fit and do those sorts of things.'

Participant 5

'You do get that sort of boys' club mentality ... '

Participant 18

Drinking alcohol and socialising was discussed by participants as one way to be part of the boys' club, with a failure to drink alcohol meaning that inclusion was more difficult to attain:

'We have a lot of non-drinkers in our section, in our squad, and it's not frowned upon but ... function time comes around and ... it's like "Oh, they don't drink"'

Participant 7

'They like to play hard and then drink and (if) he doesn't drink ... he's not part of that culture.'

Participant 8

'It's part of our Australian culture ... it's a huge part of our culture, if there's a death they have a drink, if a baby's born, they have a drink, if you get promoted you have a drink ... in the drinking no, I don't (fit in).'

Participant 18

Muslim participants discussed this issue in particular because they felt they were required to drink alcohol as a demonstration that they could be trusted, with Muslim participants stating:

'I think these days ... fitting in a team has also got to do with some social aspects of fitting into a team, be it drinking or going out to a pub and stuff like that ... '

Participant 16

'Fitting in ... unfortunately when you say fitting in, for me alcohol and socialising is a big thing that comes up and being one of the boys ... '

Participant 18

Taking part in masculinised workplace banter is another way for officers to demonstrate cultural congruence as part of the boys' club. Participants discussed how those who were perceived to be 'different' were often the target of this banter:

'It's like there's no filter, it's like we just talk about anything, whatever comes into your head ... and they forget a woman's there ... it's not offensive but ... there's no filter, you hear things and you're just thinking, are you really saying that in front of me ... '

Participant 11

'I do joke and say to blokes who I do know, you're fucking hopeless seriously, have you thought of another career choice, or the little, short ones ... you have a joke with him, you know what if we still had a height restriction I wouldn't be having this stupid conversation with you ... '

Participant 17

However, it was noted that officers from all backgrounds took part in banter:

'the Sergeant's a bloke called Smith, the sole white bloke, and ... it's the best because we always make fun of the little white bloke ... because we can!'

Participant 7 (minoritised ethnicity)

'In my office, it's quite diverse, we've got a lot of different nationalities, and we've got lots of people with different types of religion and they're quite vocal, our office is quite vocal and there's a lot of banter around ... '

Participant 5

Interestingly, participants agreed that this banter often did not comply with policy, including sexual harassment policy and policy on respectful workplaces:

'There's always a line of ... general sort of piss take² to outright people just being discriminatory I guess ... '

Participant 4

'The boys aren't going to be PC³ so we're just going to be in for complaints and costs and all that sort of stuff if complaints do come out.'

Participant 6

Willingness to comply with current cultural values is another way for officers to demonstrate cultural congruence. This is also known as the 'attitude test'. Passing the attitude test means that an officer accepts the status quo of the prevailing culture, regardless

of whether they agree with the culture, and does not complain about issues if they do not agree:

'People who complain get frowned upon.'

Participant 3

'Your co-workers probably just want to see that you can fit in, you're not going to cause conflict or anything like that ... you show that you're not combative and that you accept other people's opinions and stuff like that ... '

Participant 4

'Being part of the norm, not upsetting anyone, just being willing to relinquish your views for the good of the team.'

Participant 8

Accepting the status quo was linked to trust in colleagues, which is a necessary part of police work, considering the dangerous situations officers face together. However, this acceptance of the status quo can also include ignoring or taking part in poor behaviour, such as sexual harassment or bullying, in order to 'fit in'. This indicates a blurring of the boundaries between trust in dangerous situations (a clear time when trust is important) and trust in situations when the officer may be doing something inappropriate:

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

Participant 10

'People become cautious about interacting with somebody who's potentially likely to use things they say or use things that they do against them, it's a self defence mechanism that people utilise to avoid coming under scrutiny themselves ... '

Participant 13

For some participants, demonstrating cultural congruence through being part of the boys' club or passing the attitude test meant they changed their own behaviour to ensure they were accepted:

'When I first started, I started playing football and every Wednesday you'd play football, they'd want me to drink ... I wasn't a drinker, I didn't drink ... Everything was based on the culture of drinking and that's what formed your camaraderie if you like ... '

Participant 18

'It's not about hiding, it's like your belief system ... you sit there with someone in the car and then you see them say Leb⁴ this, Leb that, wog⁵ this, go back to your country, fuck off you fool, all this sort of stuff. Now you know all this stuff is wrong and they shouldn't be saying it, but yet if you mention your belief that you don't agree with what they're saying then you're going to ostracise yourself ... '

Participant 19

Although cultural congruence has been described here, there was evidence of cultural change in keeping with general societal change, demonstrating that this definition could change in the future. For example, participants discussed how they bonded over coffee rather than drinking alcohol and that the culture was changing to include working on physical fitness:

'The boys in that team, they train together ... '

Participant 1

'Just in morning coffee and all the rest of it he gets involved in the banter ... '

Participant 3

'He shared some of the same habits and hobbies of most of the guys, he liked to train, he liked his footy ... '

Participant 18

As such, the above description of cultural congruence is subject to change over time—an indication that police culture can and does change in line with societal expectations, as noted by Reiner [37].

3.1.2. Having Competence as an Inclusion Capital Element

Competence is an important characteristic for workers in any workplace, and policing is no different. This study revealed that competence is a key characteristic required for a police officer to be included amongst colleagues. Among the study cohort, competence includes having a strong work ethic and understanding the work being conducted. Interestingly, for a police officer to be deemed ‘competent’, both formally and informally, they must have the same characteristics and skill sets at the same standard as their colleagues, regardless of whether they have extra skills that may be of benefit to the team they work with. This contrasts with arguments advocating for more diversity to ensure different skill sets in the workplace, as in practice, officers are expected to be the same as each other.

For the most part, what participants deemed to be ‘competence’ related to formal organisational policy, especially relating to recruitment, training and promotion criteria, such as English language proficiency or physical fitness levels. The expectation is that all officers pass the same thresholds:

‘Doesn’t matter whether they’re twenty or whether they’re fifty, they’ve still got to pass.’

Participant 1

‘If he’s capable and he’s able and he’s passing everything and he gets through all that stuff, I don’t think anyone would care less ...’

Participant 13

‘I think it’s a good thing, as long the (organisation) maintains the level of standard that the people that are entering with these backgrounds and cultures can carry out their duties competently and properly.’

Participant 18

However, the perception of other participants is that competence is more nuanced in the workplace. For example, an officer who meets the required organisational competencies still needs to informally demonstrate that they are as capable of the same tasks as their colleagues and that they maintain their skills and knowledge to a high level. This means if an officer is not able to understand or complete tasks at the same level as their colleagues, they may be seen as incompetent, regardless of whether they are of minoritised status or not:

‘We had a guy who was everybody’s mate, everyone liked him, but he was probably the most incompetent investigator I had and failed the D’s course⁶ and is now in uniform in the country. But was a top bloke and everyone liked, but was incompetent.’

Participant 8

This incompetence is perceived even when officers possess extra diverse skill sets, such as speaking a second language. In essence, diverse skill sets are not valued in relation to competency. Rather, these skills are seen as ‘helpful’ for those who do have the requisite skill sets at high levels. For example, participants described officers from minoritised ethnic groups as ‘helpers’:

‘I used to say ... we have to get more, I thought it was a positive, there’s ... a lot of Chinese descent and Asian descent officers working at (name of police station) and they were such a help ...’

Participant 3

‘We’ve got officers that are Middle Eastern, and they help us ...’

Participant 5

However, participants also indicated that these ‘helping’ officers did not have a high level of understanding:

‘You’ll be working on a job and a particular language comes up and ... someone can come in straight away and speak it, if they don’t speak the Australian language as well and aren’t across our culture it all falls apart.’

Participant 2

‘If you were a Chinese young bloke coming into the police force and ... you had been raised in a very Chinese family, 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 ... ’

Participant 3

As such, ‘helpers’ are likely to find inclusion in the workplace more challenging because they are not regarded as ‘competent’ individuals; their ability to demonstrate ‘competence’ in an inclusion capital context is not as great as those who have the same skills as their colleagues.

The participants also inferred that inclusion capital relating to competency is more difficult to gain in comparison to the other two inclusion capital elements (cultural congruence and team-player ability). An officer needs more time to demonstrate competence when they first join a workplace, as opportunities may not immediately arise to do so. In contrast, the other two elements can be demonstrated relatively easily through social interaction with colleagues.

3.1.3. Being a Team-Player as an Inclusion Capital Element

Policing as a ‘team sport’ or officers working as a ‘team’ was strongly indicated to be of importance by the research participants:

‘It’s a team sport, policing.’

Participant 3

‘They don’t need to strive for promotion or anything else, but you need to be a part of the team environment and contribute in a good way, not just for your own benefit, for the benefit of your peers and for the benefit of what our role is, which is for the community ... ’

Participant 9

‘You have to have the ability to fit into a team environment and work with others ... ’

Participant 13

‘The reason to get along with your colleagues, it’s the team principle that has to be driven home ... ’

Participant 17

As such, ‘being a team-player’ is the third inclusion capital element. As officers often need to rely on one another for their own personal safety in varying levels of difficulty and danger [39], this is not a surprising finding. In this research, it was found that a ‘team-player’ is an officer who makes a positive contribution to the team and is available and reliable. For example, participants suggested that making a positive contribution can be shown by an officer by taking on their fair share of the team’s workload, keeping up morale, getting along with colleagues and being loyal to the team:

‘Getting the work done, contributing to the team and working towards the goals of the place ... ’

Participant 9

‘You spend a majority of your time with your colleagues at work and if you don’t get along with them ... and you’re abrasive with the rest of the team then that’s difficult to work with ... it’s going to take away from ... the whole team’s efficiency, if people have to deal with personalities more.’

Participant 10

‘Being part of a team, being in the team environment trying to achieve team goals and that could mean work wise, it could also be fitting in socially. Not being selfish. I suppose to the culture of the work environment, being a team-player.’

Participant 12

‘Just basically being a team-player ... they actually sort of volunteer themselves ... to help others and stuff like that when required, I think that sort of makes the office environment fairly comfortable.’

Participant 15

‘I guess in that regards fitting in would be if you fit into that type of mindset ... the work ethic, and just being able to operate as part of a team. It’s very hard if you’re not in that team.’

Participant 20

Accordingly, being available and reliable means an officer does not leave work for other officers to do (including working overtime when necessary to get the work done) and ensuring that they look after their colleagues.

In practice, demonstrating team-player attributes can often overlap with the other inclusion capital elements. For example, participants indicated that being a team-player can involve a combination of inclusion capital attributes:

‘Reliable, being reliable ... Being part of a team, being in the team environment trying to achieve team goals and that could mean work wise, it could also be fitting in socially.’

Participant 12

‘In relation to fitting in, I think my understanding is being part of a team, understanding what needs to be done and just doing it, I think fitting in a team has also got to do with some social aspects of fitting into a team, be it drinking or going out to a pub and stuff like that ... ’

Participant 16

Being a team-player can also be linked to either of the other two inclusion capital elements to increase inclusion for individual officers. In other words, whereas definitions are provided for each inclusion capital element in this research, these elements are fluid in practice, in keeping with Bourdieu’s theory [66]. For instance, an officer who is part of the boys’ club (which is part of their cultural congruence inclusion capital) will also be seen as a team-player because they get along with colleagues and keep up morale:

‘He’s one of the boys ... he talks footy, talks chicks ... he’s just a blokey bloke and gets along with all the guys ... ’

Participant 7

‘You need morale, you can be the world’s best detective, but you can be effectively inept in social skills which means no-one will work with you and no-one will back you which means you’re taking on a much more high workload because no-one wants to help you and you can’t effectively do your work as an individual. What we do is a team sport, and you can’t do it on your own.’

Participant 8

‘They’re good to have around for morale ... ’

Participant 10

An officer who is highly competent in their work (part of their competency inclusion capital) is reliable:

‘(I would choose) ... the reliability of someone competent who you can rely on ... ’

Participant 12

‘Competent is someone who is capable and has an understanding of the work and can carry out the work to a standard that’s acceptable, and someone you can rely upon.’

Participant 18

The definition of an officer who is not a ‘team-player’ provides useful insights into the ways in which officers are included and excluded because it is not necessarily the opposite of the team-player description. Non-team players question the status quo and can be perceived to act in their own interest rather than those of their teammates. This finding is connected to the idea of officers being culturally congruent, whereby officers must accept the prevailing culture to fit in:

‘If he came in and had an attitude that ‘I already know or we do it differently here’ ... that would leave him on the outer ... ’

Participant 9

‘Everyone has different opinions on things, and I might have opinions on things, but I have to be sensitive when I’m expressing them ... it’s not going to make you fit into the team very well if you’re ... sprouting of⁷ things and pissing people off you know ... ’

Participant 10

When an officer is perceived to mostly act in their own self-interest, they are also a non-team player:

‘I look at some people and think you arrogant arsehole, competency comes as a group as well, not just as an individual and especially when you work on some really ... confronting jobs, every little input from each person counts and as silly as that sounds ... it’s a domino effect, it’ll upset the troops, morale goes down, everything else starts to fall around you.’

Participant 2

This is true regardless of whether the reasons for an officer acting as such are beyond their control. Competing personal needs that make an officer regularly unavailable, such as childcare requirements, were perceived by participants as acting in their own self-interest rather than for the good of the team:

‘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 5

‘If you then had fifty percent of your workforce only there part-time or casually or not committed to being available, being prepared to travel, being prepared to work overtime, being flexible in respect to the workplace and 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 13

‘Females have already caused issues in (name of command) for example. They cause issues in most detectives’ offices, just work part-time, I know it’s sexist, but it does affect the running of an office ... ’

Participant 14

This definition regarding what officers must do or not do to be seen as a team-player overlaps significantly with the other two inclusion capital elements, thereby demonstrating the interaction between all inclusion capital elements in practice. Again, in keeping with Bourdieu’s [66] original assertions, these definitions should be viewed as fluid and subject to change.

4. Discussion

The inclusion capital elements of cultural congruence, competence and being a team-player closely align with other studies on police culture (for example, see [7,31,37,39,91–93]). The findings presented in this research further suggest that in practice, the elements of inclusion capital come together to impact an individual officer's overall levels of inclusion in the workplace. Ideally, the officer will have all three inclusion capital elements, but if they do not, it is still possible for them to be accepted by colleagues using the other two. The best way to describe the nuances regarding how this occurs is to imagine that each officer has an 'inclusion account', similar to a bank account, where they bank all three elements of inclusion capital. Together, this adds up to their overall inclusion and acceptance levels amongst colleagues. Having high levels of inclusion capital means the officer will feel more included, while low levels can indicate a lack of acceptance by colleagues. If an officer is unable to maintain enough inclusion capital, they will ultimately be excluded. While every officer needs to acquire inclusion capital, the path to gaining and maintaining levels of inclusion capital differs depending on the individual. For all officers, regardless of diversity status, ongoing effort regarding compliance with the three inclusion capital elements is required to maintain their levels of inclusion and, as such, inclusion amongst colleagues. Having high levels of all three inclusion capital elements therefore indicates a high level of inclusion in the workplace. However, as demonstrated in this research, it is generally easier for officers who fit the norm.

For example, officers from minoritised groups may be restricted in terms of increasing inclusion capital, but this does not make it impossible for them to be included. A female officer working part-time with childcare requirements may not be able to increase their 'team-player' inclusion capital because they are not perceived by the team as being available and reliable. However, they can make up for this by being highly competent in their work (competence). This suggests that they may still have a level of inclusion in the workplace. Another example is an officer who is not as competent in their work but is part of the boys' club (cultural congruence) and works overtime whenever needed (being a team-player), so they maintain a level of inclusion through these other inclusion capital elements. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that inclusion is possible for officers from all backgrounds, although the pathway to inclusion is often more difficult to navigate for officers from minoritised groups. This raises the issue that to enable increased levels of inclusion capital for minoritised officers, there will be policy implications for managers in policing organisations regarding diversity and inclusion.

Organisational diversity policy in the studied organisation at the time of this research was generally written with a particular minoritised group in mind, meaning that each policy related to one aspect of diversity but not necessarily others. When policies are written in this way, people from those minoritised groups have a clear mandate regarding what they are entitled to in a particular circumstance. For example, some officers are entitled to parental leave but not others. However, it is suggested that categorising policy in relation to particular minoritised groups may not be the best way forward for the cohort studied here because from their perspective, implementing policy that appears to favour minoritised groups can be detrimental for these officers when trying to be included. This is not to suggest that singular workplace policies regarding minoritised groups should not exist but that careful analysis should be given to how they are written and implemented in order to ensure that an individual's inclusion is not at stake when the policy is applied.

For example, parental leave policies allowing officers to take time off after having children and to work in a part-time capacity are detrimental to inclusion, despite being well-intentioned and logical because giving some officers (parents) entitlements and not others (those without children) decreases inclusion for the officer benefitting from the entitlements, as it may reduce their 'team-player' inclusion capital. Under this premise, when an officer uses an entitlement outlined by policy, especially one that requires time away from the workplace, the officer is perceived to be looking after themselves rather than their team, as well as not doing their 'fair' share of the work. This means other officers

must ‘pick up the slack’ for officers perceived to be less than a team-player. This issue is exacerbated when more than one officer is away from the workplace at a time because in these circumstances, the policing workload remains the same, but there is less personnel available to complete the work. This impacts a part-time officer’s ability to acquire or maintain team-player inclusion capital and therefore decreases their levels of inclusion.

In addition, policies requiring officers to report inappropriate conduct also have the effect of decreasing an individual officer’s cultural congruence inclusion capital if they comply with organisational policy and report such behaviour. An example is a policy requiring mandatory reporting of bullying or sexual harassment. When an officer complies with mandatory reporting, they are required to challenge the status quo regarding loyalty and being a team-player, likely resulting in a loss of cultural congruence and a reduction in team-player capital. Therefore, although these policies are designed to challenge inappropriate culture, they have the effect of a loss of inclusion capital for an officer who complies. This is not to say that the behaviour should not be challenged or that the policy should not exist. Rather, it is important to understand the effects that policy may have on inclusion in the short term, particularly when long-term change is implemented that assists all officers with inclusion in the workplace.

Whereas diversity policies are often written to ensure that officers from minoritised groups can take the entitlements they need for their circumstances or to protect those who may be subjected to bullying and harassment in the workplace, this research shows they can serve to exclude the officers who use and/or comply with them. Officers can be excluded when they use policies that are designed to help the organisation increase diversity and inclusion, leaving them with a choice regarding whether they use the policy and take something they are entitled to or not use the policy and risk being left out. To overcome this issue, it is the responsibility of the organisation to consider all outcomes for officers when creating and implementing policy. This requires managers making decisions to exercise empathy, reflexivity and a sound understanding of diversity issues [79].

To use inclusion capital knowledge effectively, police executives and policymakers should adopt a systematic, holistic and critical approach to inclusion. This means that all diversity policies should be analysed using elements of inclusion capital because all officers, regardless of their identity, will be affected.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007—Updated 2018), and Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval: H11100.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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

Conflicts of Interest: The author is the Research Officer for the Police Association of New South Wales.

Notes

¹ A ‘gym junkie’ is someone who is heavily into their physical fitness.

² A ‘piss take’ is Australian slang for making fun of someone else.

³ Politically correct or using words and language that does not offend others.

⁴ ‘Leb’ is a term used to refer to a Lebanese person and is often used to refer to any person of Middle Eastern appearance; sometimes considered derogatory.

⁵ ‘Wog’ is a derogatory term for a minority ethnic person.

⁶ Detectives course.

⁷ ‘Sprouting off’ refers to making comments when they may not be warranted.

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