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Controversial diversity: diversity discourses and dilemmas among Swedish police recruits

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ABSTRACT

Diversity strategies to increase social inclusion in organisations have been a major concern in various institutions during recent decades. This article examines Swedish police recruits' talk about diversity. The study is based on data from ethnographic fieldwork at the Swedish National Police Academy and focus group interviews of police recruits. Twenty-seven recruits were interviewed in their final year at the police academy, which included a period of probationary service at a police station. Using a discourse analysis, the article explores how the Swedish police's official policies for diversity and social equality are recognised, but also called into question, by Swedish police recruits. One dominating discourse of difference and two controversial discourses on diversity are outlined, showing that recruits frequently draw upon multiple discourses to legitimise their claims for and against diversity. A conceptual framework is developed for understanding the discourses and dilemmas of diversity within the police, with examples provided of how social order is reproduced among recruits.

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Diversity; discourse; dilemma; police

Introduction

Diversity strategies to increase social inclusion in organisations have been a major concern in various institutions during recent decades. However, research studying how this turns out in practice shows that the way in which diversity is enacted, constructed, disciplined, and, possibly, contested by actors and institutions influences how diversity can be understood – for example, in terms of equality and inclusion, or even in terms of inequality and exclusion (Ahmed 2007, 2012, Del Percio and Sokolovska 2016, Urciuoli 2016). While management literature has shown how the language of diversity is shaped within organisations as beneficial both for the organisations' business and for the groups previously discriminated against, its authors also express scepticism concerning whether the aims of diversity approaches can be met (Dick and Cassell 2002). The police is an organisation and profession where initiatives to decrease the male dominance and under-recruitment of women and ethnic minorities have been taken. But how are these changes met in the organisation? In this article, I explore how the Swedish Police's official policies for diversity and social equality are recognised, but also called into question, by police recruits in their final year of study. The questions central for this article are: *How is diversity constructed among police recruits? What identities (subject positions) do these constructions offer?* and *In what ways are these diversity discourses sustained and challenged?* The focus in the analysis is on the discursive practices through which diversity aspects and social categories are sustained and reproduced. Controversial police recruits' perspectives on diversity are

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presented, and the way these controversies can result in dilemmas is discussed, showing diversity among Swedish police recruits to be not only a complex phenomenon, but also one that contains contradictions.

Background

Since the early 2000s, diversification has come to function as a tool of legitimacy for police authorities in many countries. Policy documents, such as the Macpherson (1999) report calling attention to institutional racism in a British police force (see also Shiner 2010), have recognised cultural and gendered identities, and the inclusion of police employees from diverse backgrounds has become a political priority in many European countries. Through diversity recruitment and education, the police forces in many countries are striving to reform the professional conduct of their cadres, to improve their equality and anti-discriminatory performance, and increase the social inclusion of minorities in the police force, independently of whether such minorities are based on gender, ethnic background, or sexual orientation (see, e.g. Egge 2008, White and Escobar 2008, Rowe and Garland 2007, Wieslander 2018).

The Swedish Police adopted the term diversity in their policy documents between 2004 and 2012. In those, diversity is said to permeate the police organisation, including its active work against intolerance and discrimination, and its promotion of ethnic and cultural diversity (e.g. Swedish National Police Board 2008, 2010, National Police Academy 2010). This diversity is endorsed as a resource that contributes to improving the organisation, lending legitimacy to the police and its operations, creating a more attractive work environment, and helping make police work more efficient. Various diversity action plans have been adopted with the aim of increasing diversity in the force. For instance, since 2006 Swedish officers can apply for a permit to wear religious head coverings at work. The demands for increased diversity have subsequently been extended to target also recruitment, professional development, working conditions, and various types of service and accessibility within the police organisation itself. However, the latest policy documents, issued for the years 2013–2016 and 2017–2021, do not mention the word ‘diversity’, focusing instead on ‘equal treatment’ (Swedish National Police Board 2013, 2017). In these documents, all references to ‘recruitment’ have also been dropped.¹ In the discussion, this change is addressed further.

Research on diversity and the police

Research on the relationship between the police and the broad topic of diversity (in terms of diversity in the society, in the force, and in police work) can be described as a field that focusses on inadequacies in the police’s work and conduct (for a review, see Wieslander 2014, pp. 27–42). Internationally, ‘policing diversity’ and ‘diversity policing’ have been used to describe the relevance of diversity for police encounters with the public. In particular, the focus has been on discrimination in policing practices that tend to restrict the opportunities for individuals, where certain groups and areas are subject to stricter controls (over-policing) but offered lesser protection (under-policing) (Macpherson 1999, Reiner 2000, Holmberg 2003, Brunson and Miller 2006, Sollund 2006, 2007, Newburn and Reiner 2007, Philips and Bowling 2007, Ben-Porat 2008, Shiner 2010, Peterson and Åkerström 2013). One area of debate concerns the relationship between ethnic minorities and discrimination in police work profiling practices. These practices have given rise to the term ‘racial profiling’ (‘ethnic profiling’ in the Nordic context), which concerns the suspicion of criminal activity based on stereotypes of race or ethnicity (Ben-Porat 2008).² In particular, the police’s practice of ‘stop and search’ – when examined to determine who is stopped and controlled by the police – has shown a similar disproportionate representation of ethnic minorities (such as Roma and Afro-American people) in the justice system. The term ‘driving while black’ has been coined to describe the phenomenon (Harris 1999, Bowling and Weber 2011. See e.g. Finstad 2000, Holmberg 2003,

Sollund 2006, 2007, Egge 2008, Peterson and Åkerström 2013 for a Scandinavian context). The Swedish police has been accused of racism and ethnic profiling in some cases, where the 'Rosengård-incident' in Malmö in 2009 (see Rennstam 2013), and the 'Roma register' that was disclosed in 2013 are some of the more noticed. In the latter, the police was found guilty for ethnic discrimination (Radio Sweden 2016). In regard to debates of discrimination in policing practices, officers' encounters with minorities in society have been part of the police's diversity strategies in policies, education and recruitment in various countries. The official rhetoric of the policies suggests that increased diversity in the police, achieved through improved (often targeted) recruitment, will enhance its external relations with society, and improve work practices dealing with, for example, ethnic relationships in society. However, whether, and to what extent, this is accomplished in practice has remained controversial (for a review, see Bullock *et al.* 2016. See also Reiner 2000, Rowe 2007).

The questions of how to understand institutional racism and discrimination in the police and whether the police mistreat minorities have been burning and disputable questions in both research and within various police forces (Shiner 2010). Most argue that the treatment of minorities is to be regarded as discrimination, but it is also claimed to be unavoidable for efficient police work, for instance through an imperative of measurable controls within the police (Peterson and Åkerström 2013). Research shows that the racial practices of police work are not a one-way process, but a relational one, between the police and the public (Waddington 1999a, 1999b, Sollund 2007). Waddington suggests that white officers' racist behaviour is not triggered by prejudice or racism, but a product of police work and crime statistics, along with the everyday pressures of police work (Waddington 1999b). Others suggest that prejudices within the police reflect prejudices in society (Reiner 2000). It has also been suggested that the suspicion with which some groups are regarded is a consequence of power structures in society, reproducing patterns of implicit discrimination (Reiner 2000, Ben-Porat 2008, Sollund 2006, 2007). In this view, poverty and class structures interact with racism and institutional discrimination (Philips and Bowling 2007, Loftus 2009). Waddington (1999a) also argues that the derogatory or even racist police canteen culture is not equivalent to the practices officers adopt on the street.

Although research has documented improvements and shifts in the police's organisational norms in recent decades, these studies suggest that the diversity agenda also faces resistance founded on police occupational culture, in which an anti-diversity cultural dominance is preserved (McElhinny 2001, Rowe 2007, Rowe and Garland 2007, Loftus 2008; see also Del Percio 2016). Discrimination and stereotyping of minorities within the force have been explored since the 1990s and have been used to explain the under-recruitment of minorities to the police (e.g. Holdaway 1996, Holdaway and O'Neill 2007a, 2007b, Frewin and Tuffin 1998, Cashmore 2002). Diversity levels within the police have remained low, and are lower in the higher levels of the hierarchy (Van Ewijk 2012, Haake 2017). Strategies to increase diversity levels within the police have been met with internal resistance (Dick and Cassell 2002, Wieslander 2018). Barriers and obstacles to attaining diversity, equality, and decreased discrimination are, nevertheless, multi-faceted and the result of several factors, such as the derogatory elements in police culture in both student and work environments, the relatively low status of police work, and minorities' own perceived obstacles for being able to advance to police leadership positions (Sollund 2006, 2007, Egge 2008, Colvin 2009, Loftus 2009, Boogaard and Roggeband 2010, Peterson and Uhnoo 2012, Van Ewijk 2012, Bjørkelo *et al.* 2015, Jones and Williams 2015, Wieslander 2014, 2018). Some authors have stressed obstacles to influencing the diversity situation within the police through policies (Cashmore 2002, Clements 2008, Wieslander 2018). A gap between managerial ambitions and practice (Ben-Porat 2008, Rowe and Garland 2013) and the effects of official investigations and reports to counteract discrimination and racism have been termed 'window dressing', in both the UK (Cashmore 2002, Souhami 2014) and in Sweden (Wieslander 2018). Research has made visible the downside of what appeared to be a success when, in fact, the effects were negligible (Cashmore 2002, Loftus 2009). One major obstacle to counteracting discrimination in the police, at least in the UK and in Nordic contexts, are

the police organisational cultures, which tend to stress the profession's masculine, action-oriented, and anti-intellectual attributes, reflecting the large proportion of (white) men from working-class backgrounds in the police (Manning 2005, Skolnick 2005, Lander 2013). Diversity is often seen as threatening the police's established occupational culture, one that is preserved by the weight of the influence of the white, male, heterosexual hegemony, and articulated through sexualised bantering and discourses of conformity and uniformity (Frewin and Tuffin 1998, Dick and Cassell 2002, Loftus 2008, 2009, Lander 2013, Rowe and Garland 2013, Wieslander 2014, 2018, Rennstam and Sullivan 2018).

Nevertheless, although several authors have shown limitations to the concept and effects of institutional racism (Souhami 2014), a number of studies indicate a shift in the articulation of discrimination in recent decades. They suggest that overt racism has diminished (and gone underground) and that derogatory and racist expressions among police officers have become less tolerated (McElhinny 2001, Holdaway and O'Neill 2004, 2007a, 2007b, Loftus 2008, 2009, Souhami 2014, Wieslander 2014). Moreover, from being perceived as an individual problem, discrimination has been studied from an institutional and collective perspective, showing the relevance and power of discourse in the maintenance of discriminatory practices towards minorities in the police (ibid.). There remain, however, signs that suggest that an understanding of the relationships between structural, institutional, and individual forms of discrimination in relation to policing and the police force is still necessary (Souhami 2014), and the recent #metoo movement calls for re-attention to the sexist language and practices in the police.³ At the same time, research into peoples' intersecting identities has shown a positive trend regarding social inclusion, while not ignoring the obstacles to it that remain. This points to a need for further empirical research, looking at officers' experiences within the organisation, along with their normative positions and claims (McElhinny 2001, Boogaard and Roggeband 2010, Jones and Williams 2015). One recent study on LGB officers' experiences on inclusion and exclusion in the Swedish police has found that the policies for diversity and equal treatment facilitate organisational support and give a voice and power to the LGB officers by putting pressure onto the management when incidents occur (Rennstam and Sullivan 2018). It remains, however, necessary for LGB officers to initiate managerial action, which is why the authors use the term 'peripheral inclusion' of minorities.

Theory and methodology: the why and how of discourse analysis in police research

The various, and sometimes conflicting, theories for how to understand exclusionary practices in the police argue for further studies on the matter. This study recognises that officers' talk is not equivalent to their actions in duty. However, it does seek to reinforce the need to study what is said within institutions and how this is important in order to understand structural and institutional influences in exclusionary practices. When discrimination becomes a question solely concerning police behaviour towards the public it downplays the internal relationships among colleagues and reduces police work to a patrolling practice.

This article uses a poststructuralist discourse approach that regards talk as a social practice that comes with performative consequences (Wetherell & Potter 1992, Edley 2001). Briefly, diversity as a concept, and individuals' understanding of diversity, are seen as *constructed* through interaction and continuous negotiation between people and texts in different social contexts. Moreover, when dominating patterns of talk – *discourses* – become taken for granted, their function is also *constructive*, in the sense that they regulate and restrict peoples' ways of understanding, acting in the world, and making sense of it. This approach brings an awareness that language is used not only to communicate, but to 'do' things, such as making bets, closing deals, giving praise, giving orders, or exercising discrimination. People working in the legal system also have a duty to acknowledge the judicial meaning of speech, especially when it concerns crimes such as libel, threat, hate crime and hate speech. Thus, the performative notion of discourse as action-oriented is significant

to understand the relationship between an understanding of diversity and the consequences of such an understanding – how police recruits' discourses of diversity regulate their own and others' views of inclusion and exclusion – and what practices those discourses legitimise. This theory not only gives language a more significant role in the institutional life, it also makes visible the processes by which values and practices are normalised and made taken for granted within an institution.

In much of the previous research, there is an implicit point of departure that takes diversity and categories such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality to be fixed and pre-determinate as concepts. In contrast, and in line with a growing body of other research, this article directs its analysis to the processes through which these concepts are constructed, maintained, and legitimised in the police force (Holdaway 1997, Frewin and Tuffin 1998, McElhinny 2001, Dick and Cassell 2002, Holdaway and O'Neill 2007a, 2007b, Loftus 2008, 2009, Boogaard and Roggeband 2010, Morant and Edwards 2011, Morash and Haarr 2012, Lander 2013, Hansen Löffstrand and Uhnöo 2014, Rennstam and Sullivan 2018). Focusing on the processes of legitimisation renders visible how exclusionary practices are reproduced within the police, helping to find an answer to the question of how exclusionary practices based on ethnic boundaries are reproduced in a discursive climate in which diversity is officially affirmed as a guiding principle (e.g. Shearing and Ericson 1991, McElhinny 2001, Loftus 2009, Morant and Edwards 2011, Souhami 2014, Uhnöo 2015). Thus, this article looks at how police recruits' talk constructs diversity in relation to the police force and to police work. An analysis of these discursive practices can reveal why and how some attitudes become legitimised not only in line with, but also in conflict with, official diversity policies.

Methods and data

The data analysed in this article derive from ethnographic – inspired field studies conducted at the Swedish National Police Academy in the spring of 2010. At this time, the National Police Academy in Stockholm was the largest educator of police officers, with two additional and smaller education programmes located at a southern and a northern Swedish university. The police programme consisted of four terms at the academy, and one final probationary term at a station. Forty-five recruits from two of 16 randomly selected classes were observed during a six-week course during their final term at the police academy (term four). The participants' average age was 28: for the men, it was 30, and for the women, 25. Approximately two thirds of the participants were men. Data from field studies were drawn upon to construct an interview guide for focus group interviews at the end of the field period, and were used as secondary data in the analysis. The primary data was collected through a total of five focus group interviews with 27 of these police recruits towards the end of their police academy training programme (term four). A further three focus group interviews were conducted with 11 of the recruits at the end of their six-month probationary service at a police station (term five). In these contexts, the interviews covered topics such as diversity in the police force, diversity in relation to policy formulations, diversity related to police work, and diversity in regard to issues and education related to prejudices and the task of policing a multicultural society. The results obtained thus concern diversity at the interface between police education, service, and policy. Focus groups were used to highlight diverse and joint constructions in discussions about complex subjects (Wibeck *et al.* 2007). The method is useful to study discussions that unfold through group argumentation, and the way in which meanings are developed collectively and used in specific cultural contexts. Although the focus group discussions in this study could not be described as 'everyday talk', they were between recruits who had spent time together on a daily basis for two years, with the result that the conversations resembled those taking place in settings more informal than a classroom. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, with laughter, pauses, intonations, and emphasis marked. The duration of the interviews ranged from 40 to 100 minutes, with an average of 90 minutes. The study was approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board and follow the ethical regulations of the Swedish Research Council (2011).

Discourse analysis as theory and method for analysis

The three main research questions were central for the analysis: How is diversity constructed? What identities (subject positions) do these constructions offer and how are they expressed in diversity discourses? In what ways are these diversity discourses sustained and challenged? While the analytical focus in the examination is on culture, religion, and ethnicity, other intersecting social categories relating to gender, sexual orientation and political affiliation are also considered. These play a role in much of the diversity talk encountered in the police academy. The data produced in the field studies and in the interviews were analysed with reference to critical discursive psychology, which sees discourse as a social practice and considers both the local accomplishment of a discourse as well as its broader social implications (Wetherell and Potter 1992, Edley 2001). This approach is a reaction towards cognitive approaches on attitudes within the field of psychology. Instead of claiming to study the minds or intentions behind a statement, the analysis is exclusively on peoples' utterances *in situ* and what language in specific settings 'do'. Analytical tools such as the notions of interpretative repertoire, ideological dilemma, subject position, and discursive/rhetorical devices stress the nature of discourse as a *social practice*, highlighting the devices that facilitate such practice (see also Billig *et al.* 1988, Hall 1997). These devices provide a detailed view of practices in the context of police training, and yield information about social interaction on a micro level. I use the concept of interpretative repertoire to identify recruits' various and flexible use of the concept of diversity. This meso-level analytical approach enables the examination of conflicting demands formed by various repertoires. These repertoires are then clustered into discourses. The analysis enabled three central discourses to be identified. These are presented below with the respective key subject positions and interpretative repertoires that constitute each one. In each discourse, certain related demands for or against diversity emerged, suggesting that an analytical tool such as the idea of 'ideological dilemmas' (Billig *et al.* 1988) was needed. These dilemmas are analysed as discursive, and thus based on the inconsistency of what is *said*. The focus during the analysis was kept on resistance and the negotiations made to legitimise certain claims, which allowed us to analyse how discourses of diversity were sustained, and especially how they were challenged. Finally, I draw upon critical theories of inclusion and exclusion in relation to the concept of diversity in various institutional settings in order to examine the social consequences of these discourses (Archer 2007, Ahmed 2007, 2012, Ostendorp and Steyaert 2009, Del Percio 2016, Urcioli 2016).

Findings: diversity discourses and dilemmas

Three different meanings of diversity and three discourses related to them could be identified in the police recruits' talk about diversity: (1) *diversity as inescapable difference* (confirmation of diversity), (2) *diversity as a political goal* (recognition of diversity), and (3) *diversity as potential similarity* (regulation of diversity). In the first of these discourses, *diversity as inescapable difference*, difference was uncontested, constructed as natural and common-sensical, and constituted the central subject position 'the essentially different other'. This discourse was articulated through the normalisation of differences between people using such discursive devices as 'all people are different'. The discourse was reaffirmed through remarks such as 'that's a fact' and 'we already know that'. This naturalisation of difference (Hall 1997) leads to prejudices appearing as natural, as illustrated by such recruits' comments as 'people who claim they're free of prejudices are lying' and 'people always have a hard time with others who are different'. This talk about difference is a result of the essentialist features of the discourse linking individuals to separate social groups. At the same time, some people are viewed as *more* different than others, and hence more representative of the targets of police diversity strategies, namely, those coming from ethnic, religious, and sexual minority backgrounds. The students stress that a diverse society also makes increasing knowledge of 'the other' – how different groups in society behave and think – an important strategy in order to make police work more effective. This knowledge will enable them as officers to act in a manner that increases the trust

and co-operation of the public. The need for such knowledge was frequently brought up in the interviews in this study, as in the following two quotes:

- Nick I'm thinking of domestic violence and that kind of thing; how different cultures are and how different the position of women and children is in some communities: stuff like that. And if we don't understand them we will miss a lot of signs, signs of domestic violence, for example, and of many other things. (Focus Group 3, Term 4)
- Jesper You make mistakes. You might approach a woman and greet her when you shouldn't, for example. [Sighs] With that you destroy trust and make them irritated. And it's much harder to work with someone who's angry with you If you know their customs and routines, you have gained a lot. (Focus Group 3, Term 4)

These participants suggest that a lack of knowledge of cultural differences is an obstacle to efficient police work, and may lead to a loss of trust in the police and greater difficulties in co-operation. Diversity here presents itself as something problematical, since the differences lead to conflicts that the police must then handle. One recurring argument in this regard was that members of different ethnic groups who immigrate to Sweden continue their conflicts with one another here, implying that minorities in and of themselves are problematic.

On the other hand, diversity is also constructed as a resource for the police in terms of ethnic and religious 'matching' (in the Swedish context, see Hansen Löffstrand and Uhnoo 2014), enabling the police to send out minority police officers to meet members of their own ethnic or religious group in society. Diversity, in this sense, was linked to neighbourhoods dominated by ethnic minority groups. This link also highlighted the relevance of class when discussing diversity in the police. It was primarily 'the ethnic other' who contributed to diversity in the police, and such officers were thus referred to as the representatives of diversity recruitment to the force. Paradoxically, this discourse of difference was marked by an assumption that the 'different' social groups were internally homogenous: an assumption that people who represent other ethnic groups all think and behave the same way.

The discourse on *diversity as inescapable difference* was a hegemonic discourse, since it was not contested by any of the recruits, but rather presented as a matter of common sense. The two other discourses identified (*diversity as a political goal*, and *diversity as potential similarity*) represented conflicting ways of handling and valuing diversity and difference in the police. *Diversity as a political goal* recognised and valued diversity, while *diversity as potential similarity* restricted and led to smaller differences, through assimilation into a more uniform police. These two were mutually antagonistic, as they were based on incompatible rationales.

The discourses *diversity as political goal* was based on repertoires that acknowledge diversity within the police and in policing. Diversity was here viewed as a goal and a political choice, rather than as a self-evident matter of course. To increase diversity was presented as a strategy for the police to better reflect the pluralistic society and to act as a role model. The central subject position here was the police as 'the representative police', in which diversity in the police force was valued and seen as a way to acquire legitimacy. Accordingly, the police is to be regarded as a 'fair' authority that represents society (cf. Morant and Edwards 2011, Bradford 2014). The following quote presents an example of this discourse as used by the police recruits in this study:

- Hanna I thought about our credibility, that we have different religions and we have different experiences
- Patrik It can really show that I, as a white heterosexual male, can work together with someone from another ethnicity or sexual orientation or something. ... It shows to society that you don't have to be at odds just because you have another background. [Hanna: Mmmh.]
- Max Not everybody has to look the same. (Focus Group 2, Term 4)

In this discourse, efforts to increase diversity are regarded as part of a process that will help the police to develop as a modern organisation. In addition to inclusive recruitment, the recruits highlighted education about the multicultural society and education on prejudices and their consequences as important parts of this development. Prejudices were constructed as the use of stereotypes, which

could lead to discriminating police work, such as ethnic profiling. In line with policy in which social differences are recognised (e.g. Taylor 1999), the recruits acknowledged democratic and group-related rights such as the freedom of religion. This, in turn, legitimised religious symbols such as wearing the hijab in uniform.

This discourse on *diversity as a political goal* was presented by the recruits as having been promoted by the government through its police policies. The official rhetoric of diversity and targeted recruitment was regarded by the recruits as a mere window-dressing strategy to make the organisation look good, and the police were criticised by the recruits for 'not really' embracing diversity in the form of minority acceptance and representation (Cashmore 2002, Holdaway and O'Neill 2007a). The recruits described this official policy discourse as basically just expressing political correctness, which was related to a normative (but not negative) stance on diversity. According to them, the official stance regulated what could be said and done within the police, especially among recruits and at the police academy. This, the recruits described, included a prohibition against expressing oneself in a racist, sexist, or homophobic manner, against the (open) practice of ethnic profiling, and against openly endorsing populist parties of the far right. Ignoring these prohibitions brought the risk of suspension from the programme. Thus, the discourse defined and reproduced what was considered to be taboo and 'politically correct' within the police (see also Loftus 2008, Souhami 2014).

In sharp contrast to the discourse that valued diversity, the discourse on *diversity as potential similarity* was based on talk that limited diversity within the police and in police work. In this discourse, diversity was considered to be a luxury problem, and Sweden viewed as society that had achieved equality, at least compared with other countries. Knowledge of the diversity in the society was downplayed in favour of equal treatment by the law and the recruits' common sense. Education about cultural differences and differences in customs was regarded as unnecessary. This discourse questioned whether prejudice as a concept exists. Instead, prejudices were regarded as experiences and facts about people and groups that were useful for policing, which would this make, for example, ethnic profiling legitimate. This discourse also presented police work as 'culture-free' and guided by the professional values of neutrality and objectivity, obtained through assimilation into that which was constituted as the norm for physical appearance and behaviour. This discourse did not stress differences, but conformity and the preservation of the culture of white, male, heterosexual, and secular dominance. The values of homogeneity, neutrality, and assimilation were evoked to avoid potential conflicts arising from people's differences. The central subject position here was the 'neutral police', which is linked to other, normative – but often unarticulated – positions, as in the following quote:

Dan I think there is a point to be made that the police do not represent anyone, or do not favour any specific culture [Kalle and David agrees: No]. We don't take a stance towards Western culture and not towards any other culture either. We are completely neutral. [Pauses] That's a good point; you simply are who you are. The police are neutral and we don't have any cultural – maybe that's impossible, 'cause we might do it anyway, but it would be pretty good ... to remain neutral. So you could be accepted in all segments of society.

[...]

Kalle No; I mean, in my view, where do you draw the line in that case? Swedish officers with dreadlocks down to their ankles? (Focus Group 4, Term 4)

As shown here, the idea of the 'neutral police' was constructed through limitations of non-neutral positions. Not everyone was perceived to have the ability to be neutral, especially not individuals visibly linked to a religion, nor political extremists. Boundaries were drawn to 'the other' when the norm was visualised through statements about 'the state', 'society', and 'people', and it was embodied in the form of the secular, ethnically Swedish, white, heterosexual male. This hegemonic position is made invisible, and it became a privilege to not have one's neutrality questioned. This discourse showed similarities to the colour-blind rhetoric of white privilege, in which status within the norm provides one with the opportunity of not needing to make one's identity relevant (McElhinny 2001, Ahmed 2012).

In this discourse, the uniform was used as a symbol of police conformity. Following the logic of this discourse, one way to gain legitimate access to the force is to assimilate to the police norm, by, for

example, removing the hijab. One way the recruits justified restrictions on appearance and size applied to some groups in the police was to invoke the police mandate of maintaining order in society, and not causing disorder by provoking conflicts. The norm here is to not 'stick out', and the importance of fitting in is linked to valued norms in police culture, such as solidarity.

Dilemmas of diversity

Tensions arise between the contradictory demands of recognising increased diversity in a police context on the one hand, as in the *diversity as political goal* discourse, and for regulating diversity to a normative conformity on the other, as in the *diversity as potential similarity* discourse. Five dilemmas originating from the tensions between these competing discourses can be distinguished:

Recognition of Diversity	Regulation of Diversity
A diverse police force	A uniform police force
Personal police officers	Neutral police officers
Diversity as competence	Diversity as differentiator
Work against prejudices	Work on the basis of prejudices
Regulation of speech (political correctness)	Need for humour in police work

In this study, the discourse that recognised diversity as something politically valued and that was officially to be striven after, was expressed primarily in official documents and at the police academy by both students and teachers. Differences and a diverse police force was valued, centred around officers who diverge from the secular, heterosexual, ethnically Swedish, and white, male norm. Nonetheless, tensions arose from resistance, which was often expressed through the use of humour. This resistance was primarily articulated in the focus group discussions in relation to the police culture, and an image of the reality of police work that older officers gave to younger colleagues. These diversity-restricting accounts were regularly expressed under the banner of neutrality, and were grounded in the implicit normativity of a secular 'common sense'. The police were presented as a neutral profession without visual evidence of private traits.

The *first dilemma* of the antagonistic discourses was that between the need for a diversified force and police conformity. The police are expected to represent a pluralistic society, while being a profession that requires conformity and neutrality. In relation to this dilemma, the recruits negotiated various reductions in diversity within the police and the professional status of 'the visibly religious police officer'. The police uniform served as a symbol for conformity, and the participants argued that a police force with too high a degree of visible diversity will be experienced as provocative by many, and will thus cause disturbances in society. Closely linked to this was the *second dilemma*, between the personal/private and the neutral/professional. This dilemma involved the struggle to define the borders of neutrality: what kind of personal and private traits can be permitted without threatening the neutrality of the authority? One field in which this dilemma is expressed is religious identity, while another is political opinions. Recruits must negotiate both fields, and analyse the legitimacy of 'the prejudiced police officer'. They experienced the task of counteracting discrimination as being challenged by racist or otherwise prejudiced officers, and suggested that the effects of discrimination included covert racism in police investigations. These two dilemmas were interrelated: the neutral and professional police officer was based on the norm of white, ethnically Swedish, secular men. However, the norm was contested through accounts that suggested neutral, non-cultural preferences were problems.

The *third dilemma* is seen in the way that diversity can at the same time make it easier to ensure the supply of competence and lead to discrimination. There is a paradox in considering the positive aspects of differences in people's social background, while attributing subject positions to others, with discriminatory implications (cf. Boogard and Roggeband 2010). In the context of this dilemma, the subject position of 'the successful immigrant recruit' is under negotiation, and it can be seen that being associated with inclusive recruitment is a stigmatised position in the context of the traditional police culture (Wieslander 2018).

The *fourth dilemma* involves the question of whether to work against or on the basis of prejudices. This dilemma has been frequently discussed in previous police research in terms of the issue of racial or ethnic profiling (e.g. Waddington 1999a, Sollund 2006, 2007). The mission statement for the Swedish police includes an imperative to work against discrimination and xenophobia, and it makes it clear that acting on prejudices is a discriminatory practice. At the same time, those in the police profession are also assumed to work on the basis of prejudices, so as to be able to notice more readily anything conspicuous (Finstad 2000). The recruits in this study, for instance, negotiated their contradictory claims of representing ‘the unprejudiced police’ and of regarding Roma people as representing ‘the criminal other’.

The *fifth dilemma* was two-fold. It centred on what was described as a need for humour in police work, to counterbalance the need to regulate speech in accordance with politically correct (non-racist, non-sexist, and non-homophobic) principles. This dilemma arose from derogatory and sexist banter, a feature often found in police humour (Dick and Cassell 2002, Rennstam and Sullivan 2018). Such humour limits the use of certain bantering devices, such as irony, to ‘safe spaces’, in which utterances are concealed from the public and from other recruits who are critical (Holdaway and O’Neill 2007b, Loftus 2008, Uhnoo 2015).⁴ The recruits used various ways to legitimise the humour and normalise it as something important for the creation of a sense of fellowship, necessary in a dangerous and demanding profession. The question of what makes humour discriminatory was negotiated between the recruits, and even when it was suggested that the jargon was ‘raw but cordial’ and ‘shared by all’, and in this way produced parallel practices of inclusion and exclusion. One example is the recurrent humoristic use of the descriptor ‘bloody faggot’.

Figure 1 shows the relationships between controversial discourses, demands, and dilemmas.

The following example illustrates the relationships between conflicting discourses and their demands, and shows how they result in dilemmas. The recruits expressed an ambition to respect human rights, yet suggested that obstacles in their everyday reality stood in the way. Freedom of religion, for example, are constructed in two ways: one as freedom of religion concerning religious rights, which recognises officers’ request to wear a hijab in service, while the other concerned freedom *from* religion, stressing the symbol-free neutrality of the police authority and restricting the use of religious headwear due to its potential provocativeness. This way of confronting ideological ideals with alleged practical difficulties was not unique, and has been previously described (e.g. Wetherell and Potter 1992). As shown by others (McElhinny 2001, Loftus 2008, 2009), police recruits use a diversity discourse that recognises differences to handle accusations of racism and their possible stigmatisation as racists. At the same time, they express discursive anxiety or ambivalence in these diversity-related discussions (most significantly in discussions concerning racism, prejudice, and religious symbols among the police). Several recruits described how they find the question of an officer’s right to wear the hijab in service as ‘annoying’. The following quote illustrates how the situation can give rise to a dilemma:

Jon This is a tough question. In part I think that, well, everyone can be whatever they want – human dignity and respectfulness and so on. [The other four recruits grin and Kalle interrupts, also grinning: ‘But! ... ’] And

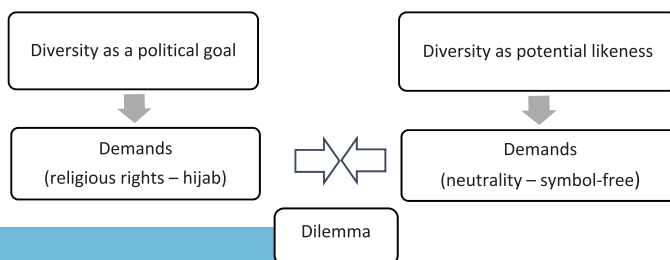


Figure 1. The relationships between discourses, demands, and dilemmas.

it's a multicultural society. But at the same time you feel like 'Damn, is that alright?'. I feel very ambivalent about that. (Focus Group 4, Term 4)

Even though Jon, in this quote, does not explicitly articulate the controversial discourse, the word 'but' and his confession to feeling ambivalent signal that opposing arguments can be made (Billig *et al.* 1988). While this illustrates the inconsistencies in individuals' reasoning and their use of multiple discourses, the same was made even more explicit in another case, that of Patrik. For example, in an earlier quote above, Patrik drew upon the discourse of *diversity as political goal*, but in the next excerpt he draws upon its opposing discourse, that of *diversity as potential similarity*. In it, two collective 'us-as-the-police' notions are negotiated between Patrik and Chris through the conflicting repertoires of the two discourses:

Patrik

The police should always remain neutral. [Several recruits nod in agreement] It should neither be Muslim or Christian or anything else.

[...]

Chris

But – but the important thing is that we, as we work here in Sweden – that we believe that Islam and democracy can be compatible.

Patrik

Yes, yes, I agree.Chris

You can be a Muslim and still work in a democratic country.Patrik

Yeah, yeah; but then again [Pauses] [Raising his voice] But then how does the society look upon that when a, let's say a Christian meets a Muslim officer? How does he [a Christian individual] feel about that?: 'No, you say this and that just because you think differently or have a different religion and you look down on me.'

[Overlapping talk. Chris argues that the same reaction occurred with women officers 30, 40 years ago. They interrupt each other.]

Chris

Society is changing as long as we have democracy, so I think it's a difficult question too.Patrik

I'm not saying I'm opposed to that; I'm saying society is. (Focus Group Discussion 2, Term 4)

Besides the construction of religions as homogenous entities, all of which stand in opposition to each other as a source of conflict, and the construction of Islam and Muslims as anti-democratic by nature, what the extract here shows is how individuals in this study used contradictory discourses in their negotiations and legitimisations of a subject. What it also illustrates, however, are aspects of the struggle and boundary making involved in the construction of 'the neutral police', and the way in which a non-religious position is made normative. Furthermore, it pinpoints how the composition of the police (the 'us' that is being negotiated) should be understood.

In both of the last two quotes, allowing the hijab in uniform is presented as being called for by the religious rights and freedom of religion by individuals, thereby signalling inclusivity. However, this picture was also challenged by some recruits, who proposed imposing restrictions on the use of the hijab based on a notion that people should not have to meet and encounter a person with another religious identity than their own – in what could be described as a freedom *from* religion. The resistance to diversity and difference in the police, symbolised by officers wearing religious headscarves, was linked to obstacles in the perceived everyday reality as officers in a secular society. 'I'm not opposed to diversity, but society is' was a frequently used rhetorical device. Among other things, it allowed the speakers to express anti-diversity views and to regulate difference in the police, without being labelled as the source of the statement, or, in other words, a racist. Hijab restrictions were justified by some interviewees who claimed that the police mandate to maintain order in society would be jeopardised if people began to feel that they were being provoked. Accordingly, a regulation of diversity in the police force was legitimised with reference to a public that, it was assumed, opposed diversity. The police's mandate to uphold democratic rights (and a democratic order more broadly) was downplayed and overshadowed by its mandate to maintain order in society.

Discussion

To increase diversity in the police is part of a proactive strategy intended to increase equality and equity within the police and in society. On the one hand, diversity discourses may provide legitimacy and serve as a resource for marginalised groups when they make demands and aim for greater inclusion and recognition. On the other hand, when the focus is placed on what distinguishes people from each other, diversity discourses may reduce minorities' legitimacy and power within the organisation, and recreate stigmatised positions and injustice (Wetherell and Potter 1992, Boogaard and Roggeband 2010, Del Percio 2016, Urciuoli 2016, Wieslander 2018). The diversity discourses legitimise giving people a value on the basis of their social background. This entails the risk of essentialising people and thereby reducing them to a single category. This concerns not only the stereotyping that occurs during police work, which may give rise to legitimisation of discriminatory practices (Holmberg 2003, Sollund 2006, 2007), but also the stereotyping within the force. Although minority positions within the police are framed as providing resources for the organisation, recruits and officers with minority ethnic, female, and sexual identities can be described as only 'peripherally included' (Rennstam and Sullivan 2018). They continue to be victimised and depicted as outsiders in police organisations – even in the post-Macpherson era (Loftus 2008, 2009, Peterson and Uhnoo 2012, Jones and Williams 2015). These signs of 'inequality regimes' (Acker 2006) provide obstacles to using these symbolic frames as empowering tools to overcome marginalisation practices within the organisation.

Using diversity as a concept without taking into consideration the power structures and the resistance to change of these power structures in the context in which they are used may change very little. In contrast, increased diversity risks reproducing practices by which minorities are excluded. To increase diversity may also be reduced to a project for minorities, with diversity only needed where diversity is said to exist (certain neighbourhoods, for example). Inequality may therefore be reduced to a question for those exposed to it, instead of being seen as a societal problem. Categories also face the risk of being contrasted against one another, as minorities are placed into a dichotomous relationship to a normative belonging, where the norm is often taken for granted. Moreover, enhancing diversity through inclusive recruitment may conceal unequal practices within the organisation, when diversity is used as evidence of the equality work performed by the organisation. Information about inclusive recruitment may be used for institutional promotion (Ahmed 2007, 2012, Urciuoli 2016). As Ahmed (2012, p. 65) has argued:

Perhaps the promise of diversity is that it can be both attached to those bodies that 'look different' and detached from those bodies as a sign of inclusion (if they are included by diversity, then we are all included). The promise of diversity could then be described as a problem: the sign of inclusion makes the sign of exclusion disappear.

In this sense, police organisational efforts for social recognition and inclusion through the diversity discourses lack a discussion of the normative positions that are taken for granted. There is, therefore, a need to recognise the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the discourses on diversity, if one is to enhance their standing and legitimacy among the rank and file. The complexity in the question can also be addressed with a closer focus on intersecting identities, including socio-economic positions and whiteness (McElhinny 2001, Loftus 2009), and a closer focus on how change towards greater inclusion is resisted. Diversity awareness attained, for example, through diversity training, can also be promoted by illuminating normative positions through norm-critical perspectives, and by illuminating the police cultural norms that sustain the normative positions.

The discursive struggles described above should be seen as relating to a 'both-and' situation, not an 'either-or' situation. The language in use in the struggles remained always situational and adjusted, in order to legitimise different versions of diversity depending on the context and the subject matter. Diversity and its representatives were constructed in various, and not always compatible, ways (Ostendorp and Steyaert 2009). The recruits resorted to conflicting discourses in parallel and at the same time; as a result, their descriptions and justifications were often inconsistent. In some contexts,

the recruits' talk challenged racist and discriminatory practices, which, again, were reproduced in other contexts. The discourse regulating diversity was not articulated by white males only (in contrast to Loftus 2008, 2009 research); it was a discourse deployed and reproduced through the cultural norms shared and maintained at the police academy more generally (albeit by some recruits more than others). The discourse recognising diversity was articulated also by white men, not just those from minorities. Indeed, the same individuals could articulate contradictory discourses, rendering questions of racism and discrimination among recruits more complex and rather misarticulated: to the extent that individuals express themselves both in anti-discriminatory and in discriminatory ways, enquiries into individual racism risk being both misleading and one-dimensional. Moreover, they may conceal the focus and knowledge of institutional exclusionary practices and routines (Rowe and Garland 2013, Souhami 2014). The fact that many recruits in this study made use of both discourses suggests that the same individuals can both do, re-do, and undo diversity work. This suggests that further studies looking at institutional discourses and ways to legitimise various 'truths' within the police are necessary, rather than studies that focus on the individuals who use these discourses.

The above analysis of talk in the police educational context contributes to our knowledge of how difference and social order are reproduced through recruits' use of diversity discourses. How discourses can regulate individuals' actions and choices is exemplified by one recruit's explanation of how prejudices had affected him even though he had never himself encountered a Roma person: 'I think it's interesting that I've got the same idea [of Roma as criminals], even though I've never arrested a Roma woman for shoplifting'.

However, it is also relevant to question the role and legitimacy of diversity ambitions within the Swedish police authority. The authority placed a great deal of emphasis on it between 2004 and 2010, but has recently toned down the importance of diversity in recruitment and in employment policies and strategies. In the most recent diversity and equality work plan of the police, the term 'diversity' has been dropped altogether, being replaced by the term 'equal treatment' (The Swedish National Police Board 2013, 2017). Several factors may have played a part in this de-legitimation of diversity, such as the questioning of affirmative action strategies in the police training programme, the criticism met by the fifty-fifty admission rate for women and men, and a court case against the police authority initiated by 130 men claiming discrimination based on affirmative action (see Wieslander 2018). It seems that diversity has lost its branding value for the police and is no longer trendy enough to be used even for window dressing.

The ideal of equal treatment, as proclaimed in police policies, may also conceal exclusionary practices, just as the concept of diversity in the police focusses exclusively on individuals' differences, and may in this way reinforce exclusionary practices. As a result, diversity as social inclusion becomes compromised by its own legacy. The lack of accounts of equal value that accept differences and highlight human value reinforces obstacles to inclusion. The question is, therefore, whether an increased emphasis on equal value can shift the focus from ideas of deviance, and instead assign individuals a value based on their sameness as part of a shared humanity. However, the discourses on diversity in the police are part of diversity discourses in society at large, and the way in which they give a structuring order to various groups will probably change very slowly and meet with considerable resistance.

Conclusions

This article has outlined three diversity discourses from the talk of police recruits in their final year at the police academy. The hegemonic discourse, *diversity as inescapable difference*, confirmed people's difference as uncontested and natural. However, two additional controversial discourses also emerged in the material, focussing on the ways diversity should be handled and valued within the police: *diversity as a political goal* (recognition of diversity) and *diversity as potential similarity* (regulation of diversity). These contradictory discourses resulted in specific dilemmas.

The contradictory nature of the diversity discourses encountered in this study reflects a struggle for a different ‘us’ that can regulate the conception of the ideal police, one’s professional conduct as an officer, and the ways in which policing ought to be performed. The discourses that were identified served to maintain a sense of social order, as exemplified by a discourse that restricted and limited minority identities, as well as other positions perceived to deviate from the dominant image of the Swedish police. Diversity discourses among police recruits affirmed social categories particularly associated with diversity, while a superior norm was assumed to regulate diversity efforts in the police.

The analysis shows that the norm within the police is constructed in analogy with the image of a secular, ethnically Swedish, white, heterosexual male. This norm gave those who were ascribed to this position a value-free neutrality, actualised as a non-problematic subject position. The subject position of the ‘neutral police’ was demarcated using specific categories such as visible religious identity, an ethnic minority background, or political activism. The diversity discourses were also hierarchical, with some social groups portrayed as more representative of diversity than others. The non-normative backgrounds attributed to police officers were frequently associated with diversity in the workforce and viewed as resources in the police’s work vis-à-vis different groups in society, such as when conducting ethnic and religious matching. The diversity discourses identified in this study were based on differentiating practices, which could then result in individuals fixed in stereotypical categories. This way, diversity talk – although aiming to promote social inclusion – could lead to social exclusion instead. Re-phrasing Archer (2007, p. 640), ‘the rhetoric of diversification might be better called a discourse of stratification’.

Against the background of these contradictory discourses, diversity in the police emerges as a context-dependent concept in a state of flux. What a diversity discourse will and even can accomplish depends on who defines the term, how, and for whom (Ahmed 2007). The findings of this study present how diversity can be used as a flexible rhetoric device depending on the specific topic. For example, diversity was posed as a luxury problem, since equality has already been achieved in society. This idea was juxtaposed with diversity as a politically still unachieved goal, since not everyone is fully accepted as a member of society. Another example is provided by the idea of ethnic and religious matching. Such matching was regarded as a positive tool for the police, except when an officer in a hijab managed to provoke members of the public by her appearance, in which case matching turned into ‘mismatching’. Visible religious positions were constructed as the cause of problems based on prejudices in society, not in the police organisation. In this conception, the power to determine what is permitted in the police, and by extension in society, thus lies with anti-diversity forces. That being the case, discourses about diversity can only fail to address fundamental issues of historical inequality and subordination (Urciuoli 2016).

In summary, the results from this study indicate that Swedish police recruits are struggling with a need to manage contradictory demands. A discourse sustaining exclusion and inequality competes with the pursuit of increased social equality. The ideological ideal of equal rights contrasts and even conflicts with a perceived notion of a neutral authority, but also with the mandate, realities, and difficulties of police work. The police’s mandate to uphold democratic rights is compromised by the mandate to maintain order in society. Resistance towards change for diversity is based on arguments for the sake of the society and efficient police work.

Notes

1. During 2017 the Swedish Police removed all policy documents concerning diversity and equal treatment from its website.
2. There is no international consensus on the terms ‘ethnic profiling’ and ‘racial profiling’; in some cases race is being used synonymously with ethnicity and in others they are distinguished.
3. The Swedish equivalent to the #metoo movement among female police employees is named #nödvärn (Eng: self defence) and had collected 1522 signatures from police employees up until April 2018 (https://www.skrivunder.com/upprop_nodvarn). Witness testimonies have been published online in a report called #nödvärn (2018).

4. While Loftus defines these safe places as 'white spaces', i.e. 'spaces where the white majority feel comfortable enough to resist and subvert aspects of the diversity agenda' (2008, p. 764), in this study this humour was reproduced by all recruits, of all social backgrounds. However, there were also power relationships at play here, with individuals described as not conforming to the police norm sometimes only winning collegial acceptance by partaking in and reproducing this humour (Sefton 2011, Wieslander 2018).

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