

“Monkey in a Cage”: the Complicated Loyalties of Mid-level Academic Women Working in Higher Education

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Abstract

Loyalty raises a dilemma for women’s career progression and leadership because it signals confidence in the organisation, despite the ongoing constraints that organisations present for women and their leadership aspirations. The research investigates women’s loyalty in the context of higher education. Focussing on a select group of mid-level female academics, the paper will argue against a common sense understanding of loyalty as an expression of female care. A critical reconsideration of loyalty as care is made possible by analysing the ‘utility of loyalty’ and how it becomes a legitimate organising principle that operationalises institutional and personal objectives. How women enact loyalty draws on agency theory to explain and analyse the way loyalty is appropriated by women. The results show contradictory actions around loyalty, however, these can be clarified by agency theory to demystify loyalty and critically analyse how specific work actions and practices shape explain seemingly contradictory and emotive responses. The complications around women and loyalty are expressions of a substantive rationality through which mid-level female academics respond to the uneven opportunities, limitations and constraints that influence their work, profession and relationships.

Introduction

When Weber referred to the *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, ‘iron cage’ of bureaucracy, he created a powerful image of ‘inescapable fate’ (Weber, 1978). The title of this paper references this image drawn from a reflection of a mid-level female academic when asked to describe her work in a metaphor. Reflecting on her fate within the higher education organisation, she described herself as ‘a monkey in a cage being fed messages to conform’. The image is evocative because in addition to the rational traps and narrow quest for efficiencies, evident in Weber’s iron cage, the mid-career woman is rendered to less than human status. Denied her humanity, she is merely a monkey. This analogy has connections with other metaphors that decrease autonomy, creativity and important work. That a participant in the research, summed up her experiences thus, has created a starting point from which to unpack her experiences, and that of other participants, who share the socio demographic space of mid-level female academics.

Much research has been conducted examining the conditions for women in higher education (Morley & Walsh, 1996, Blackmore & Sachs, 2005). The major focus of the research has been on the question of leadership, specifically the lack of women in leadership (White, 2003). For example, “women account for only 23% of university presidents, and that percentage has not changed in the past 10 years (The White House Project, 2009). Baltodano, Carlson, Jackson & Mitchell (2011), state,

Although women now comprise the majority of the workforce, only 39% of females 16 and older work in management or professional occupations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Across the 10 industry sectors studied in 2009 as part of The White House Project, women held an average of 18% of the top leadership positions within each sector (Baltodano et al, 2011, 64).

In order to further explain the lack of women in the top leadership positions, understanding the barriers that create obstacles for women's progression necessitates investigating the earlier stages of the leadership progress from which the movement towards leadership originates. For this reason, investigating the mid-level of university hierarchy may provide insight about the barriers and obstacles experienced by women that influence progress towards leadership.

How women understand and experience their work and organisations can be a multifaceted undertaking as there are many factors and conditions that influence the status of women and their leadership prospects within higher education. This paper focuses on the concept and practice of loyalty and raises issues around how women's loyalty intersects with their prospects and aspirations for leadership.

Rousseau (1990) defined loyalty as a measure of identification and involvement in the organization. The definition encompasses both individual and group interactions that influence identification and a practical element in the form of participation. Determining degrees of identification and involvement is relative to two perspectives, that is, the employee and the employer. This paper explores loyalty for the employee's perspective, particularly how loyalty is created and sustained by mid-career female academics. Loyalty is constructed as a problematic phenomenon for this group of academics because it highlights contradictory conditions for mid-career female academics. It raises questions about the purpose of loyalty and to whom is loyalty directed, when considering the postmodern context of most higher education organisations characterised as,

...the instability of situations; the characteristic changing, porous boundaries of both social worlds and arenas; social worlds seen as mutually constitutive and coproduced in the negotiations taking place in arenas; negotiations as central social processes... (Clarke, 2003, 557).

The higher education context is less stable, changing and socially constructed, therefore, when considering loyalty and commitment, the object and purpose of that raises questions to whom and for what purpose? Some argue (Brody & Rubin, 2011) that the large scale social and workplace changes have led to a 'commitment crisis' (164) and a watering down of the social contract between employers and employees. Others like Root and Young Jnr. (2011) suggest that the flexible and more tenuous nature of employment have further eroded the notion of loyalty to the organisation. The implications of these questions are ambiguous and in need of further clarification to explain the contractions and how these influence career and leadership opportunities for mid-career female academics.

The paper will begin with a working definition of loyalty and why it has been identified as important to further understanding of women's leadership aspirations. Loyalty is further unpacked through an agential explanation before applying the agential framework on the discussion and analysis of the results from a survey and selected interviews of mid-

level female academics. The critical discussion will argue against a common sense understanding of loyalty as an emotive response demonstrating care, rather, the discussion will propose that ambiguous responses to loyalty show that mid-career female academics are cognizant of broader workplace issues and effective actions which characterise loyalty as social and political action.

Background

Loyalty is comprised of identification and involvement (Rousseau, 1990). In further detail, identification and involvement draw on notions of commitment, ethics and obligationsⁱ. Much has been written about organisational loyalty from the employers or organisational point of view. From the organizational perspective, loyalty is sought from employees in order for them to assume responsibility and perform their work in a reliable way (Baylin, 1993). Literature also suggests that organizational interests are served by retaining committed and engaged employees in order to optimize organisational survival and well-being.

Further research on organizational loyalty categorizes loyalty in three ways, namely, affective continuance and normative commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Loyalty can be affective, meaning that the employee has strong positive feelings and attitudes towards their organisation. Other forms of loyalty include continuance, which suggests that loyalty is measured against the costs of leaving an organisation. For example, losing benefits and friendships are examples of economic and social costs involved in leaving an organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Thirdly, normative commitment draws upon feelings of obligation towards the organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1991). For example, many teachers may feel disgruntled by their work and constant changes to education policy but often prioritise the obligation they feel towards their students that keeps them attached to their workplace. Organisational loyalty, considered from the organisational perspective, is mostly concerned with ways to explain the loyalty mindset of employees and how the organisation can adapt to mitigate changes to that mindset.

This paper shifts the focus away from organisations, to the mindset of a subset of employees, namely mid-level female academics, within higher education organisations. Loyalty has been described as reciprocal commitment that is worker loyalty is matched by organisational loyalty (Brody & Rubin, 2011). In order to unpack loyalty from an employee's perspective, a more detailed focus on how employees understand and experience loyalty is required. The focus on understandings and experiences draws on agency theory as a way to frame the phenomenon of loyalty and explain how it is enacted within the practices of mid-level female academics. It is only by examining the academic's actions and utility of loyalty that the concept can be problematized. In essence, examining the agency of loyalty enables further discussion around whether organisational loyalty enable women's progress towards leadership or whether loyalty is a problematic form of commitment.

Theorising Loyalty through Agency

The focus on the relationship between loyalty and agency provides a basis for analysing the loyalty responses from the group of female academics and the degree to which women are 'caged' by the organisational structures and how their independent and collective actions intersect with these. Agency refers to how systems of human relationships are created and sustained by and through actions. It is made up of actions that are part of the obligations of a particular position that carry degrees of authority and autonomy which are enabled through structural interaction (Archer, 1984). While the relational interconnectedness of structure and agency determine the degree and capacity for action, Healy (1998), it is possible to consider the role of agency as separate from structure in order to focus on actions and how these are constituted (Archer 1995, 1996) and in order to clarify how each works and interacts (Archer, 1995).

Archer's definition of agency effectively desegregates agency into three basic components; obligations, authority and autonomy. These three elements further unpack the types of actions and how these are constructed and motivated by particular agents. A similar framework for unpacking agency has been used to deconstruct the agential actions of teachers within changing education systems (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007). Different actions engage different aspects of agency and can be more powerful than others. For example, actions that fulfil workplace obligations may not reflect independent agency because meeting obligations usually means following set rules which frame your position or work conditions. Academic obligations specify how academics work with students, research outputs, administrative work and so forth. These require action on the part of the agent to meet the expectations and obligations of the work. However, these actions are more to do with compliance to the role. Similarly, an agent may have authority and expertise but not the autonomy to act upon these. An agent may also have autonomy, however may not have the authority to determine the extent of autonomy within the structural context. A powerful agency is apparent when all three aspects are determined by the agent and are enabled through structural interaction.

Significantly, Archer identifies reflexivity, as a bridge between structure and agency, 'mediating deliberatively between the objective and structural opportunities confronted by different groups and the nature of people's objectively defined concerns' (Archer, 2007, 61). The limitation of this research is that the reflexivity of the participants has not been fully captured to clarify how they perceive loyalty from a range of different perspectives in their relations with others and with the institution. However, a reflexive discussion arises from the interpretation of the data in order to explain and reflect upon the women's loyalty and what this suggests about their relationship to the institution. For example, reflecting upon the 'caged' reference in the title, the subjective reality of the participant suggests that structural opportunities for free action are not existent. In this case, the subject is constrained in how they create their work, how they exercise their authority in the workplace and how they demonstrate their autonomy and power to make decisions. From a reflective agential analysis of the 'caged' metaphor, it is possible to assume that the participant's agency is thwarted and career aspirations limited. It raises the question about the purpose of loyalty in such a stifling context.

How agency is linked to loyalty the impact this relationship has on mid-level female academics will form the basis of theorizing how women understand loyalty. What happens when loyalty is contextualised within the organisational structure and relative to women's agency will be further analysed by examining how they construct their loyalty and the implications for this construction on women's capacity and progress towards leadership positions within higher education.

Research

As part of a 162 item survey aimed at exploring the workplace relationships of mid-level female academics, 74 women, across three Australian Universities, responded to six items relevant to loyalty related questions. The respondents were initially identified through the National Tertiary Education Union, to ensure they were at mid-level of the employment scales, and a request for their participation was sent through a union distribution list. The participation was voluntary. The responses to the questionnaire were collected according to a 7 point scale ranging from agreement (1) to disagreement (7). The results are initially interpreted through frequency statistics and basic graphs of the collected data.

In order to gain more reflective insights into how the women understood and experienced loyalty, eight participants were further interviewed in order to explore in greater detail their understandings. The interview lasted for 15-20 minutes and covered a range of topics relevant to female academics, one of which was the concept and practices of loyalty. By drawing on the interpretations from the tables and reflections from the interviews, the analysis will investigate the influence of the loyalty of mid-level female academics analysed through an agency framework that critically explores the relationship between agency, aspects of loyalty and the experiences of the participants.

Results

Australian universities have five academic levels ranging from level A, which is, associate lecturer level and the first rung on the academic ladder. This level is for beginning academics, usually working on their doctorate degrees while employed within the university. It is also reserved for those who may focus predominantly on teaching. Level B and C are considered mid-career levels for academics. Levels B and C are expected to demonstrate a range of academic work inclusive of teaching, research, and administrative. However, the ratio of academic work can vary depending on the academic and their qualifications and experience. For example, while rare, it is possible to achieve these levels without a doctorate, especially when the academic may have extensive experience to bring to their role. It is also necessary to add that there are sub levels within B and C and the number of sub levels and remuneration can depend on the university. It is also useful to note that moving between levels is dependent on promotion and meeting university requirements. We asked the participants to nominate their current employment level in order to confirm their mid-level status.

Table 1. Employment level of female academics



In 2006, women made up an average of 40 % of academics. Twenty three per cent of women are in the senior levels of academia, that is levels D and higher (AVCC, 2006). This suggests that about 67 % of women occupy levels A-C in Australian higher education. The graph is consistent with broader data because it shows from the 74 participants, 55 % were in level B and 45% in level C, illustrating a falling off of female numbers in relation to employment at higher academic levels. From 2002-2006, there has only been a 5% increase in the number of women occupying senior academic roles (AVCC, 2006), which implies that over 60% of women are located in lower to mid-level positions.

While a majority of female academics are located in the lower to mid-levels, this positioning does not reveal the extent of their ambitions. The majority of women in the study, 67%, indicated that they wanted to reach senior academic levels. Only 1% wanted to remain at level B, 30 % at level C and a majority, 37%, wanted to achieve level D, associate professor level, while a further 30% aspired to achieve a full professorship at level E. The results show that female academics are ambitious.

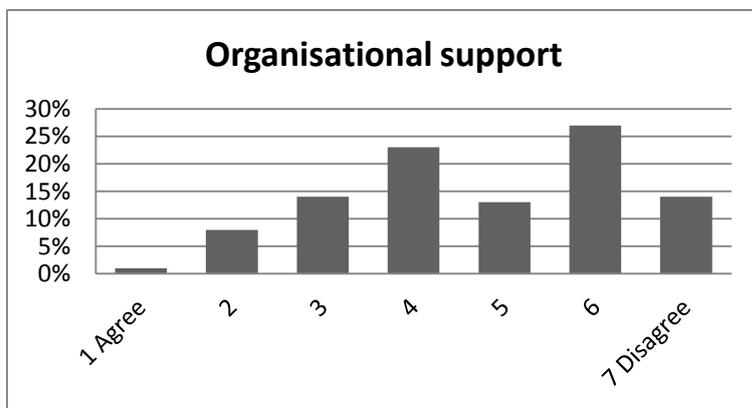
Table 2. Leadership Ambitions of mid-level female academics



When the participants were asked to rate their ambitions against leadership, the results delved further into the question of leadership. Overall, 67 % indicated some level of

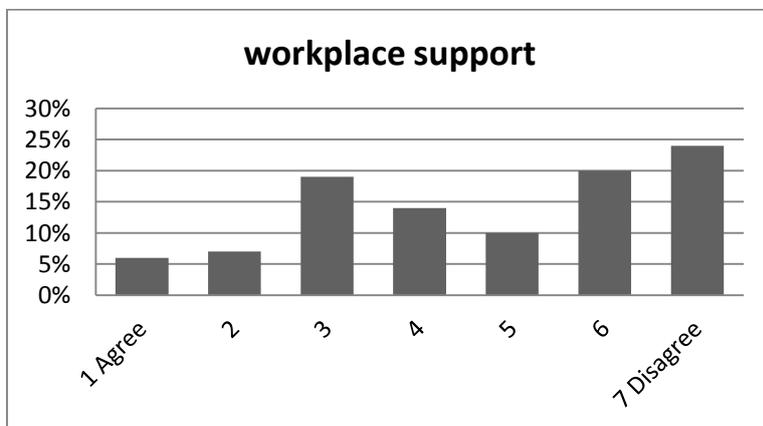
leadership ambition with just under 50 % indicating a strong level of ambition. This illustrates that almost one out of every two mid-level female academics are seeking leadership. The leadership expectation of the participants belies the statistics that show a marked falling off of the number of women in more senior and leadership positions in higher education. Table two suggests that while the statistics are compelling in showing the relatively smaller number of women attaining senior or leadership positions, the participants have yet to internalise the phenomenon so that aspirations are modified. In terms of agency, this table suggests that the participants have a belief that they can enact their agency in order to achieve promotion within existing structures.

Table 3. Organisational support for career



As agency and capacity to act is dependent on structural conditions, tables three and four focus on how the organization supports the women’s career aspirations. Table three considers the women’s experience of organisational support, while table four focuses on the more immediate workplace context. In table three, only 23 % of the participants describe the organisation as supportive. Over half of the participants, 54%, disagree that the organisation is supportive.

Table 4. Workplace support for Career



The workplace, characterised as a department or school, fared almost the same in terms of support. Only 32 % agreed that their workplace was supportive of their career aspirations. Only 6% agreed that their organisation provided strong support. Overall, 54 % found their workplace unsupportive.

The experiences of the mid-level academics and their lack of career support problematizes the common sense understanding of loyalty as one of mutual reciprocity (Brody & Rubin, 2011). Much literature (Meyer & Allen, 1991 and Fischer, 2004) suggests that organisational structures are designed to extend the social contract between employers and employees. However, the results show that the higher education context is not constructed as supportive or mutual beneficial for mid- level women in meeting their career expectations. While women believe that they can shape their work towards achieving promotion within the current structures, table 2 shows high levels of leadership aspirations, tables 3 and 4 suggest a gap between aspirations and institutional support for those aspirations.

It can be expected that a workplace or organisational context that is not supportive of career aspirations would test the women’s confidence in the organisation and or context in being beneficial. Barbalet (1996) tried to explain this apparent contradiction about remaining loyal to situations that do not reciprocate. When the reality presents obstacles, yet the belief continues that these can be overcome, despite evidence to the contrary, what is the role of loyalty? He points out, “The significance of loyalty to the wellbeing and preservation of the organisation increases as the rational viability of the organisation decreases” (Barbalet, 1996, 86). He alludes to the complication around analysing loyalty as simply rational causal behaviour. In other words, loyalty is simply not a rational proposition but draws on other factors that enable loyalty.

Barbalet’s suggestion is critical to consider when discussing the participants’ responses to loyalty. Despite only 23 % of the women experiencing organisational support for the career, table 5 shows that 74 % identify as being loyal to their organisation. Of that percentage, 20 % identified strongly as being loyal.

Table 5. I am loyal

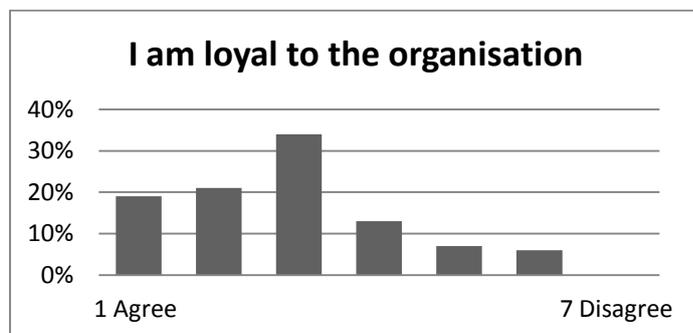


Table 6 attempts to unpack loyalty further. The question was intended to investigate common sense mystification of loyalty as an emotional response, and one that exists outside the actions and interactions of women. At the most common sense level it shows that what others may put down to ‘women being emotional’ can be analysed from a political and social perspective. Theorists like Oxley and Wittkower (2011), emphasise that women have no control over their feelings, thus are bound by their gender role in how they respond. They suggest,

We do not have direct control over our feelings and emotions; we do not have the ability to suddenly become loyal....our loyalty is not subject to choice (Keller, 2007 cited in Oxley & Wittkower, 2011, 43).

This poses the question, is loyalty an emotive need for women or can it be explained otherwise as some aspect of deliberate actions? The participants indicated that 64% had a level of ‘need’ to be loyal, while 25 % refuted a loyalty need. The results do not fully explain whether loyalty is an emotive need or something else. For example, there is another way to interpret loyalty through the concept of substantive rationality (Barbalet, 1996) of loyalty. Substantive rationality is inclusive of a broader awareness of interrelations and actions that operate within the organisation. This awareness is inclusive of social and political associations. The suggestion is that perhaps the participants have an organisational awareness that demonstrating loyalty serves a useful purpose that overrides the experiences of poor institutional support.

Table 6. The Need to be Loyal



Rousseau defined loyalty as a form of identification and involvement. The key question remains whether women identify and involve themselves with their institution as an emotional response, despite the very unsupportive social contract offered to the majority of women or is this a deliberate action. Research (Root & Young Jnr., 2011) suggests that loyalty is the foundation of social contracts between employer and employee but does the contractor responses around women’s loyalty reflect the ‘feeling centred’ understanding of loyalty as a kind of care (Oxley & Wittkower, 2011)? For example, Oxley & Wittkower (2011) argue that women are governed by an ethic of care that structures their relationships. This ethic of care has a biological component arising from the role of women to take care of children, families and be the care givers. They claim that these feelings and actions are transcribed to the workplace. If this is the case, then women’s agency is not only influenced by the existent structural relationship that constrain women and hamper progress towards

higher career levels, but more broadly, women's agency is as influenced by their biology as much as their rational actions.

Results from the interviews

The interviews of eight participants were conducted to delve more deeply into their understandings and experiences of loyalty and further the investigation around women's contradictory responses to loyalty. A limitation of the study is that these interviews were not only focussed on loyalty, but were inclusive of asking about a number of issues pertaining to mid level female academics. The interview data was transcribed and references to loyalty were extracted. For this reason, not all the participants are represented in the discussion. Analysis of the discussion will take a reflexive approach to describe the participants understanding of loyalty relative to their social reality of the workplace.

On loyalty

As illustrated in tables 5 and 6, most of the represented interviewees emphasised their loyalty to their organisation. The strength of the loyalty is elaborated on by subject 3 when she equates loyalty to 'defending the organisation'. When asked, do you feel loyal to your organisation, she states;

I probably do, I defend it. And actually I find myself as loyal to this organisation as to the uni (subject 3).

When pressed further, the subject revealed that it was not only the current organisation she was loyal to but she implied that loyalty was a characteristic behaviour.

Interviewer: *Okay would you say that you would probably tend to be loyal to any organisation that you worked for?*

Subject 3: Yeah probably. Yep.

Organisational loyalty is emphasised further by subject 4. It further suggests that women are not being loyal to their organisation for specific reasons, rather loyalty is an extension of behaviour. As subject 6 states, she needs a 'reason to leave' and without this, she remains loyal.

Oh yeah, I mean I have been here at Melbourne for ten years nearly eleven, my previous job I was there for four and that was the shortest job I ever had and the only reason I left there was because I came to Melbourne so I tend to stay in organisations for a long time. When I was project managing I had seven years in an organisation, yeah I am quite loyal. I need a reason to move generally so yeah (subject 6).

Subject 4 was very detailed in expressing the overriding emotion of loyalty, even to the exclusion of advice and suggestion that conflicted with her commitment to her institution. Having finished her Ph.D. the subject was given advice to start her career afresh, "it's better for your career", however she chose to ignore this advice to enact her loyalty to her research centre and institution. When this loyalty is not rewarded, she expresses a kind of bitterness towards her institution.

I felt really quite bitter in the end. I put a lot of time into that institution professionally across all the areas I'd been on; I'd been on board, I've been on ethics committees, I've been student rep, I've been a representative on a

whole.. I've done a lot of sort of university promotions activities putting back...(subject 4).

It appears that subject 4 expected a reciprocity from the institution, some sort of reward or payoff for her contribution. However, this was not to be and it took 12 years for the expectation to wear off. The realisation that loyalty is not rewarded has a deeply personal influence on her. She states,

There was no loyalty to me after 12 years that I felt a worthwhile employee of that university. I did of the centre but I didn't of the university, I felt that I was just a, I was nothing you know and I think that's very common and I think it's just sort of... so loyalty it's interesting I think women do feel loyal but I think there comes a time when you realise that it's not a two way thing actually (subject 4).

The realisation that loyalty is not always rewarded is more evident in the response of subject 7. The subject suggests that she has undergone some sort of change in attitude about loyalty. However, her statement also suggests that she may not be comfortable with abandoning loyalty and moving on.

I think in my more recent job but not in this current one I would have said that my loyalty was very high, very high and that was sort of characteristic of other people who were there too. So really strong commitment to what we were doing and why and therefore respect for each other because we are all on the same page, however then I've moved so obviously my loyalty wasn't as good as I thought it was.

The subject has gone from 'very high, very high' loyalty to now questioning her loyalty because she changes jobs. She reflects that perhaps her loyalty, despite being very high, wasn't 'as good as I thought'. As with the other interviewees, the subject takes a very personal assessment of loyalty as a personal quality.

When asked what their loyalty was influenced by, so far it is possible to suggest that in some instances it is an identification with the institution (subject 3 & 7), and identification with the workplace (subject 4). Subject 2 suggest loyalty to her PhD students and her work as motivators for loyalty.

So if that served your career, if you had an opportunity to move up as you said to be promoted at another university, would you do that without hesitation?

Now I wouldn't be able to because I have started some new things here, that's what is keeping me here.

Alright so your tie is more to do with the work you are doing rather than the institution itself.

Yes. And to some degree I could do that anyway but I do feel loyalty to my PhD students, I do feel commitment to them that I want to see them complete their projects. If I take on something new, I would feel bad about leaving and abandoning them. So they are the things that I am kind of you know... so I don't it is to the institution, it is more to the commitments that I have made (subject 2).

For subject one, the lack of loyalty has come about out of a realisation that institutions change and the imperative is for people to change also.

But I also realise that it has changed and that it is changing and that it needs to keep changing so even though I might have some political or philosophical opposition to the ways that it is changing ...I still accept that that is how it is and it is going to keep changing and you either go with the flow or else you just go slamming against it and who wants that (subject 1.).

It appears that change and coping with change challenged women's loyalty. Subject 3 explains why by comparing male and female responses.

..in things that I've read about men in the workplace, any workplace, women, like I said earlier, women will wait until they are really expert at something before they ever consider another job and then they think oh but I can't leave this organisation, I haven't finished this, I haven't finished that, where men would say, oh here's another opportunity off I go. I haven't done that yet but I'll go. So it's much more about your own ability that helps (subject 3).

When the subject was pressed as to whether women have a 'sense of care' for the organisation, she responded, "Yep, the organisation and the colleagues. Don't let the team down, that sort of thing (Subject 3).

In addition to not letting others down, subject 5 suggested another reason. She suggests that women have a lack of confidence and being loyal is a way of coping with a 'poor situation'.

...a lot of them [it] doesn't occur to them that they could go somewhere else. So they see loyalty as being well this is where I am I need to make the best that I can here rather than loyalty of this is the best organisation in the world and I am so glad I work here.

Subject 5 suggests that loyalty is more about keeping a secure job and not having the confidence to compete for better jobs. Subject 5 also experienced some sort of revelation about her limitations in her current work place and her not willing to 'just cop it'.

I just went okay I get it, I am never going to get promoted here and what is going to happen is all these other people are going to be promoted over the top of me and I am going to end up working for these people and I can see the future and I don't like it, you know it was more that (subject 5).

Overall, the interviews reiterate the findings from the survey that women are loyal to their organisation because they identify with the organisation, relate to their colleagues and work, want to support students and continue their work. The central question is whether these expressions of loyalty can only be explained as expressions of care or are they expressions of strategic and rational action.

Discussion

The use of agency as framework for analysing women actions overcomes the oversocialised view of actions as only shaped by social context, and the view that mystifies actions as biologically determined. Both perspectives characterise women's capacity as predetermined and their agency restricted. When referring to the 'caged' metaphor, it appears that this may

the case. The caged metaphor shows that the women in the cage is 'disabled' from action. However, when the metaphor is interpreted through agency framework, another perspective is offered which is less disempowering of women.

The paper set out to argue against the common sense mystification of loyalty as an expression of women's biological programming to care (Oxley and Wittkower , 2011.) The reason is that such a common sense understanding of loyalty disempowers women sustaining the thesis that women have little choice in how they respond and act within their organisations. By being emotionally tied to their organisations, it implies that women are not cognizant of broader workplace issues and the sociology of work which includes understanding of political and social associations (Root & Young Jnr., 2011). Alternatively, by focussing on agency and unpacking the understandings and actions of women, it is possible to challenge the notion that women's choices are essentially predetermined by emotional care and attachment. Without the framework of agency, which acknowledges that workers, inclusive of working women, are not passive but active participants in shaping their work context, the common sense understanding of women's emotional attachment and loyalty cannot go unchallenged.

As stated in the opening sections, there are at least three categories of loyalty and each serves a different purpose (Meyer, and Allen, 1991). The discussion will draw on these categories, interpreted through agency theory, in order to unpack the apparent contradiction that women remain loyal despite limited organisational commitment and that this phenomenon can only be explained in terms of emotionality and care.

Loyalty can maintain relationships for different reasons. One aspect of loyalty is more emotional. Affective loyalty draws on the positive experiences and these bind the person to the organisation. On the surface it can be assumed that all women's actions in this study were governed by their affections. However, this is not the case, in many cases women identified with their work, their collegial relationship and their Ph.D. students as the subjects of their loyalty. It can be argued that all these loyalty subjects are part of the work of a professional and an academic. Their loyalty actions are not blindly tied to emotional obligations, rather, they were fulfilling some aspect of their professional work in order to demonstrate their skills and expertise. Research by Simard et al (2008) for example, affirmed that both men and women are equally likely to be loyal to their work rather than their organisation. In other words, mid level female academics were not merely being caring for their work relationship and institutions, but maintaining arrangements in order to engage with their work and show their authority as professionals. The female academics showed a high commitment to loyalty as demonstrated in the survey and interviews and this demonstration can be indicative of the female academics engaging and connecting with their work and showing expertise, knowledge and skills, within their workplaces. Rather than the common sense understanding of their work relationship as simply caring, the women are demonstrating an awareness of their relationships and actions that operationalize their professional capacities. Their loyalty is evident in their work practices rather than the abstract of caring. For example, subject 2 states, "Yes. And to some degree I could do that anyway but I do feel loyalty to my PhD students, I do feel commitment to them that I want to

see them complete their projects". The academic demonstrates commitment in relation to her role as a supervisor of students' projects.

Another aspect of loyalty is the continuance aspect which keeps people loyal to their current workplaces because they weigh up the cost and benefits of moving (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Part of the rational configuration of loyalty relates to having an understanding of social, economic and political factors that influence work. For example, very real considerations about job opportunities, security and employment issues factor highly in continuance of loyalty. Subject 1 states that she will 'go with the flow' which can illustrate a kind of understanding of continuance loyalty because the higher education context is changing and uncertain. Within such a context, decisions about moving are not only about loyalty to the institution, but reflect a realisation that the institutional conditions are part of the broader changes taking part in higher education.

It can be further argued that while subject 5 may criticise women for staying too long in an organisation, what women are doing by staying is weighing up the costs and benefits of moving. Considering the lack of progress made by women across the higher education sector towards leadership, the intent to continue in one organisation is reflective of a broader awareness that issues around women in leadership are not simply an institutional issue but a broader political issue around gender and leadership.

There is a rationality behind women's tendency to be loyal and stay within their organizations when considering their lack of professional autonomy in making decisions about their career when the higher education structures are so influential over the outcomes. Further investigation would need to be undertaken to analyse whether women's loyalty to unsupportive organisations is a demonstration of awareness of limitation of professional autonomy. For example, to create different conditions in other institutions is not based on individual actions but relies on a collective action based on the professional autonomy of gender and diversity groups and associations to politicise gender and opportunity within higher education. The inherent structural barriers that prevent women from leadership opportunities are not only evident in one institution but are evident more broadly in the culture of higher education (O'Connor, 2000). Organisational culture shapes social expectations that frame relationships between groups (Lawson & Shen, 1998). Different groups adapt and integrate this culture (Schein, 1992) and some are rewarded. The lack of women in leadership in higher education indicates that leadership in higher education rewards males. As argued by Mouzelis (Cited in Healy, 1998), 'The durability of institutions 'lies not in their "materiality" or lack of norms, but in the fact that, on the level of social integration, powerful interest groups support them more or less purposely' (Mouzelis, 1996, p. 3). When considering the powerful metaphor of the 'caged' women, this metaphor is not only representative of one woman's experience but perhaps of many, up to 54 % who receive little support from their organisation. However, the possibility is that women choose to stay because of the continuance aspect of loyalty.

Thirdly, normative commitment draws upon feelings of obligation towards the organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1991). If we define obligation in terms of agency, it refers to the relationship between employees to the rules and regulations that shape their work. In

other words, obligation is not an emotive connection, rather a relational, professional identity construct. For example, to be an academic, there are specific obligations around the profession, the work and the nature of the relationships. It can be argued that the obligation to be loyal is a normative commitment because it underscores the social contract between employee and employer (Brody and Rubin, 2011). In other words, women being loyal is indicative of women taking seriously their social contract and the expectation around the contractual arrangements. What is evident from this form of normative commitment is the sense of malaise and disappointment evident in the responses when the social contract is not fulfilled. For example, 67 % of women indicated an aspiration towards leadership, yet very few believe that their employer is committed to this outcome. The bitterness expressed by some women at the lack of rewards is indicative of a breach of contract. While it can be argued that women take a long time to reach this conclusion, nevertheless, the gap between expectations and how these are met do suggest the emergence of a commitment crisis for women in higher education. Rather than explaining women's commitment and loyalty to their workplace and organisation as a caring one, the normative explanation drawing on agency suggests that women are making choices to meet their contractual obligations as professionals. It shows a serious commitment to their professional identity and fulfilling the expectations of what it means to be an academic. Many women cited the importance of their work, the commitment to the university in terms of committee membership and so forth and the necessity to have functional working relationships. These are not only emotive constructions, but demonstrate that the obligations of the profession are enacted through the women's work and relationships. This is a deliberative enactment of professionalism.

Conclusion

Descriptive and overtly psychological approaches to analysing loyalty limit understanding of how women actively construct the loyalty within their work, relationships and practices. The aim of this paper was to illustrate contradictory responses of a group of mid level female academics to loyalty. The contradiction appeared to suggest that despite difficult, constraining and inequitable experiences, women still maintain organisational loyalty. Others have chosen to explain this phenomenon in a normative way drawing on women's biological determinism as care-givers, which they argue, women translate into their work environment. However, analysing women's contradictory responses in the survey and in the interviews, from an agential perspective, illustrates women's substantive rationality at work. According to Barbalet (1996) this is a demonstration of a substantive rationality, an emotionally aware and rational response that is part of social agency as being inclusive of emotional experiences of work. Women make decisions about organisational loyalty in order to optimize opportunity to build and demonstrate their expertise. They are future orientated in ensuring that attaining skills, knowledge and expertise is a pre-requisite for leadership. For this reason, they value and prioritise professional relationships, building their knowledge and working with their research students. It can be argued that mid level female academics remain loyal to develop their skills and professional capacity as an academic. Loyalty is

therefore an agential expression of how seriously women internalise the social contract of employment. In return, there is an expectation that this contract will be honoured by the institution and women will be rewarded. It is the realisation that this contract is not equally binding that underscores the feeling of being ‘caged’ and overlooked. While further research needs to be undertaken to explore how agency intersects with loyalty, this paper suggests that women’s apparently contradictory response to loyalty is indicative of their understanding of the uneven opportunities, limitations and constraints that influence their work, profession and relationships as well as the political and social issues around women in higher education.

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