Where loyalties lie: A study of workplace dissent through the lens of loyalty

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WHERE LOYALTIES LIE: A STUDY OF WORKPLACE DISSENT
THROUGH THE LENS OF LOYALTY

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Katelyn L. Santy
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May 2013
ABSTRACT

This thesis studied organizational dissent through the lens of loyalty in order to examine the nuanced motivations of employees’ choices to dissent. The goal of this work was to approach loyalty as a nuanced concept that provides a foundational motivation for employees’ dissent. In order to understand the contextualized experience of dissent, I conducted individual interviews with 17 employees in the radiology department of a healthcare organization.

I adopted a grounded theory approach to data analysis, yielding a series of major findings. First, participants described their loyalties in the workplace as multiple and involving four distinct dimensions: organizational loyalty, coworker loyalty, patient loyalty, and personal loyalty. Participants also acknowledged that their multiple loyalties sometimes cross paths. Thus, employees continuously weigh their loyalties in their decisions to speak up or remain silent. In addition, I found that employees’ dissent experiences were deeply related to loyalty. When discussing the perceptions of others’ dissent, their actions were deemed loyal or disloyal based on the personality of the dissenter and the motivation for the dissent (e.g., patient concerns yield loyal dissent; personal concerns yield disloyal dissent). In comparison, participants described their own actions of dissent as being motivated by multiple nuanced loyalties. Employees always defended their own actions of dissent as loyal, regardless of the motivating loyalty (e.g., personal concerns may be just as loyalty as patient concerns). All of these findings reflect the broader cultural understanding of both loyalty and dissent within the organization. I found that both macro level (top leaders’) attitudes toward dissent and
micro level (direct supervisors’) attitudes toward dissent influenced the employees’ perceptions of loyalty and likelihood of dissenting.

Ultimately, this work contributes to the scholarly discussion of dissent by exploring the nuanced motivations of dissent and the influence of loyalty on dissent. In addition, the dimensions of loyalty framework proposed in this thesis contributes to the theoretical and practical discussions of loyalty by suggesting that loyalties are multiple and significantly influence communication decisions in the workplace.
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has been approved as meeting the thesis requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Without the guidance and support of several people, I would not have been able to complete this work. It takes a village to complete a thesis.

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- Types of Motivations and Employees’ Likelihood of Choosing to Dissent
- Types of Motivations and Perceptions of Loyalty for Others’ Dissent
- The Dimensions of Loyalty Framework
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

By nature and by definition, dissent involves disagreement with culturally expected opinions (Gossett & Kilker, 2006; Kassing, 1997). As prolific dissent scholar Jeffrey Kassing (2012) explained, the term dissent comes from the Latin meaning "feeling apart," indicating that a dissenting employee feels apart from his or her organization (p. 29). Perhaps an employee takes issue with a particular policy, schedule, protocol, or action taking place at work; dissent is the communication of these countercultural views. Any workplace would provide plenty of opportunities for expressing dissent, though the choice to speak up involves a complex web of considerations (Kassing, 1997, 2002, 2008). In my view, one primary consideration is the role of loyalty in the action of dissent, although this topic is not discussed in present scholarly examinations of dissent. The goal of this thesis is to begin exploring the relationship between dissent and loyalty in the workplace.

The concept of organizational dissent is evident in Hirschman’s (1970) theory of exit-voice-loyalty in organizations. His theory defines voice as an active attempt to change or correct a difficulty within an organization. In recent scholarship, dissent is considered a specific type of voice (Gossett & Kilker, 2006) wherein an employee chooses to express disagreement inside or outside the organization (Kassing, 1997). This perspective of dissent recognizes the value of employee voice by using disagreement as a mechanism for positive change.
Most of the recent theoretical and practical perspectives of dissent allow for organization members and leaders to realize the positive implications of dissenting (Kassing, 2001, 2002). In fact, Kassing (2001) found that survey respondents believed employees who express articulated dissent were more likely to have strong workplace relationships and be more satisfied at work. Thus, on a conceptual level, leaders and organizational members recognize that dissent can be helpful and powerful in improving the organizational experience.

On the practical level, however, the fear of organizational retaliation (Westin, 1981) and workplace social consequences (Lipman, 2012) continue to be intimately tied to silencing disagreement. While the individualism of U.S. culture rewards dissenting as a sign of critical thinking and continuous improvement, dissent that stirs up too much disagreement or trouble is often criticized or dismissed as being unproductive and disloyal (Redding, 1985). When attitudes toward dissent seem so unpredictable, it is no wonder that organizational dissent seems to be surrounded by a cloud of uncertainty. Phrases like "rocking the boat" or "stirring the pot" often indicate that dissent is unnecessarily upsetting to the status quo, and therefore it is an unfaithful action that hurts the organization, rather than helping it (Redding, 1985). As such, the act of dissenting retains a connotation of being disloyal to the workplace norms established and upheld through practice and silent agreement.

I argue that significant difficulties emerge from the historical assumption that dissent is always and only disloyal to the organization. While leadership strategies have shifted to emphasize the beneficial and innovative functions of dissent, the cultural echo
that disagreement is disloyal remains in today’s workplace. Yet, the role of loyalty in the choice to speak up is strikingly absent from the theories and examinations of dissent. Because the two concepts are so deeply connected, in terms of perceptions and motivations, the relationship between loyalty and dissent became the focus of this work.

**Purpose of Study**

I am drawn to examine this relationship because of my own experience as an employee and supervisor. During a particularly tumultuous time at work, my coworker and I introduced and facilitated a major change to our staff, one that I personally disagreed with and that I thought would unnecessarily complicate our work processes. I considered myself a loyal and dedicated worker, and I struggled with my feelings of disagreement and with my choice of how, when, and to whom I would voice my dissent. My loyalty in the workplace simultaneously *encouraged* me to voice my concerns for the greater good and *discouraged* me from disrupting the workplace experience for myself and my peers.

In light of my own experience and my examination of the current scholarship, I propose that the discussion of dissent in the workplace is incomplete without acknowledging the complex motivations for the development and expression of dissent. I contend that loyalty is a driving factor in employees’ choices to dissent. A diversity of loyalties (loyalties to an organization, coworkers, clients, a partner, family, or community) serve as the often invisible foundation of workplace dissent.

In Hirschman’s (1970) theory of exit-voice-loyalty, the concept of loyalty is connected to passive optimism that the organizational situation will ultimately amend
employees practicing loyalty stay with the organization, but do not actively participate in altering it. In contrast, I define loyalty in terms of the allegiances that influence employees' choices in the workplace. I contend that loyalties form the foundational motivations that are enacted through the words and behaviors of an employee, such as choosing to voice dissent or remain silent. In past research, loyalty (or disloyalty) has been considered a single-dimensional trait of an employee, rather than a complex underlying motivation of workplace action.

The purpose of this study is to gather employees' narratives of their dissent experiences, including the perceived motivations of their own and others' dissent. Gathering data qualitatively will allow for examination of the nuanced experiences of employees as they explain the complex influence of loyalty on their workplace dissent.

In the past fifteen years, dissent scholarship has primarily taken a quantitative approach that involved cross-sectional research (Kassing, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2008, 2011). Quantitative methodology has allowed for the validation of dissent study both academically and practically, but it does not allow for the close examination of organizational culture as it influences the practice of dissent. This study involved a close examination of a single organization, allowing me to become imbedded in a particular culture to understand the complexities of dissenting communication. In this way, this research fills a gap in methodological approach and presents an opportunity to explore emerging influences on dissent that were previously unexamined.

Because I focus on dissent through the lens of loyalty, the development of a new framework for loyalty in the workplace emerges from this study. Previous approaches to
workplace loyalty considered it one-directional and singular. The literature acknowledges loyalty to the organization as the only type of loyalty at work. I contend that a system of multiple loyalties exists, articulated in four separate but interrelated dimensions, that guides employees’ workplace actions. I suggest that a web of multiple complex loyalties shapes dissent, and likely shapes several choices in communication action at work. The dimensions of loyalty framework may be a useful tool for examining a wide variety of organizational communication concepts both in theory and in practice.

Preview of Thesis

I begin this thesis by reviewing previous research about organizational dissent and organizational loyalty in Chapter 2. After finding limited theoretical research and no empirical study of the relationship between loyalty and dissent, I developed a methodology to conduct qualitative research in a single organization, as outlined in Chapter 3. After obtaining organizational cooperation and Institutional Review Board approval, I began gathering data on-site at the radiology department of a large healthcare organization. Over the course of three weeks, I conducted 17 individual interviews with staff members from a variety of work roles.

In Chapter 4, I articulate several major findings emerging from the data. First, employees see their workplace loyalties as plural, including four major dimension of loyalty: organizational loyalty, coworker loyalty, patient loyalty, and personal loyalty (e.g., values, family, professional advancement). In addition, employees view others’ dissent as loyal or disloyal based on broader perceptions of loyalty. Typically, the employees’ perceptions of other workers’ dissent was considered loyal if it served the
larger organization or was motivated by concerns for patient care. Other workers' dissent was considered disloyal if it was perceived as self-benefiting. When considering others' dissent, employees did not usually consider loyalties as nuanced and multiple. However, when describing their own choices to dissent or remain silent, employees often explained their actions in terms of their complex motivations or loyalties. Furthermore, employees defended their own choices to dissent regardless of the motivating loyalty. Finally, most participants acknowledged a complex relationship between concepts of dissent and loyalty. The relationship between loyalty and dissent can be beneficial or antagonistic, making dissent a particularly powerful and complex form of workplace communication.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, I connect the original insights of my research with ongoing academic conversations and describe the theoretical implications of this analysis. I also provide practical implications from the perspective of organizational leaders and individual employees. Finally, I examine the limitations of this study and the directions for future research building from this work.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research about dissent in organizations is complex, because although the desire to express feelings of disagreement has always been a part of the organizational experience, the recognition of this type of communication began fairly recently. There is a growing body of research on the topic, most of which has been developed in the past 20 years (Kassing, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2008, 2011). In fact, even the theoretical underpinnings of dissent can be traced back less than 50 years (Hirschman, 1970). In addition, reviewing the research about organizational dissent means unifying diverse bodies of literature. The literature reviewed here draws from scholars of organizational dissent, whistleblowing, business ethics, and organizational behavior; this diversity assists in developing a clearer explanation of existing dissent research. I begin this review of literature with a closer look at the history of dissent, which includes a discussion of what defines organizational dissent in comparison to other actions of employee voice. I then address the literature studying obstacles to dissenting, as well as the relationship between organizational culture and dissent. Finally, because I believe considering loyalty will assist in understanding the motivations for dissent, I discuss the practical and theoretical scholarship regarding loyalty in the workplace as it relates to dissent.

A Brief History of Dissent

The recent emergence of dissent in organizational literature is likely related to the multiple names scholars have used to describe speaking up. Therefore, I begin by briefly
discussing the different terminology historically used to describe dissent. Before the 1960s, it was primarily considered insubordination for employees to voice disagreement (Westin, 1981). Throughout the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, most academic discussion of employee disagreement was termed whistleblowing (Miethe, 1999; Westin, 1981). In some cases, the terms dissent and whistleblowing were used interchangeably to describe employees speaking up in response to immoral or illegal organizational action (Elliston, Keenan, Lockhart, & Van Schaick, 1985). And, for some business ethicists, dissent is grouped under broader terminology like freedom of speech, employee voice, or workplace democratization (Seeger, 1997; Werhane, Radin, & Bowie, 2004).

Today, the term whistleblowing is used specifically to describe an employee voicing concerns about waste, fraud, dangerous work conditions, or other immoral or illegal behaviors to authorities outside the organization (e.g., government agencies, police, press; Clampitt, 2010). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, whistleblowing is considered a relevant subset of organizational dissent, with dissent encompassing any voiced disagreement at work including, but not limited to, immoral or illegal organizational behaviors.

These changes in language are, no doubt, reflections of the approach taken to employees' communication in the workplace, a timeline I trace beginning in the mid-20th Century. Given the strict organizational hierarchy and negative attitude toward boat-rocking seen before the 1960s (Bendix, 1956; Redding, 1985), dissent was not acknowledged until scholars and practitioners developed new perspectives on the nature of dissent, as seen in the development of theoretical frameworks.
Hirschman's (1970) theory of exit-voice-loyalty was one of the first favorable perspectives on dissent in the organizational setting. From Hirschman's perspective, employees choose their reactions to workplace dissatisfaction by assessing their loyalty to the organization. Employees with less loyalty are likely to leave the organization (exit), employees with more loyalty are likely to stay with the organization (remain loyal), and some who stay may choose to express their opinions about the conflict (voice). Hirschman's work framed voice as a tool for improvement, and hinted that employees using the action of voice may, in fact, demonstrate a high level of loyalty (Graham, 1986; Hirschman, 1970).

Several years later, Farrell (1983) proposed a fourth dimension to the exit-voice-loyalty model, suggesting that while some employees remain loyal by staying with the organization and performing well, others choose to stay with the organization while neglecting their work (e.g., performing poorly, avoiding assignments, arriving tardy). In addition, Farrell argued that each of the behaviors in the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect model could be understood on two continua: behaviors that are active or passive and behaviors that are constructive or destructive. Although Farrell described the two dimensions as continua, they are set up as functionally opposite and mutually exclusive categories. I agree with Gorden (1988) in challenging the categorization of exit-voice-loyalty-neglect behaviors as such, because doing so begs (or perhaps ignores) the question to what or to whom is the behavior constructive or destructive. I find it helpful to acknowledge that not all voiced dissent is beneficial to the organization, and not all silence is good for the
employee, although those actions would be categorized as only constructive or
destructive, respectively, under Farrell’s (1983) model.

Another extension of Hirschman’s theory (Graham, 1986) illustrated sensitivity to
the variety of reasons an employee may dissent. Graham (1986) suggested the term
principled dissent to describe the perceived moral or ethical responsibilities of an
organization from the perspective of an employee. In this model, the primary factors for
dissent include the perception of the problem’s severity, the personal responsibility for
the dissenter to respond, and the likelihood of the response to promote change (Graham,
1986). Hegstrom (1999) extended the notion of principled dissent by pairing it with
personal-advantage dissent, describing disagreement based on the benefits or costs to the
individual employee. While such a differentiation is helpful in understanding the styles
and circumstances of dissent, polar opposite and binary categorizations are potentially
limiting to the way scholars and practitioners understand dissent. Other scholars, like
Redding (1985), described a breadth of reasons for disagreeing with an action of a
company. According to Redding (1985), organizational actions may be described as
illegal, unethical, insensitive, inefficient, or annoying, and the choice to express dissent is
based on the severity of the grievance.

Redding (1985), like all of the scholars discussed thus far, presented a theoretical
proposal about the function of dissent. Most practical/empirical dissent research has
emerged in past 15 years and has focused on how dissent is manifested in the workplace.
Jeffrey Kassing, one of the most prolific and widely-cited dissent scholars, developed a
model and instrument to explain and measure dissent in organizations (Kassing, 1997,
1998, 2012). In his 1998 publication, Kassing described the need to shift from a purely theoretical approach to a generalizable quantitative methodology. He began by developing a model wherein he claimed a triggering event causes an employee to feel disagreement for any number of reasons. After considering the organizational, interpersonal, and individual implications of the dissent, employees choose how they will voice their disagreement as either articulated (upward) dissent to their superiors, latent (grousing) dissent to coworkers, or displaced (venting) dissent to non-work friends or family (Kassing, 1997, 1998, 2012). Kassing’s terminology continues to be widely used in describing the types of dissent.

In addition to developing this model of dissent, Kassing (1998) also developed an instrument to quantitatively measure the likelihood of dissenting. This instrument, called the Organizational Dissent Scale, measures three factors: individual employee characteristics (such as argumentativeness and verbal aggression), employee perceptions of the organizational attitude toward dissent, and the overall likelihood of expressing dissent. Using a cross-sectional survey study of six organizations throughout the U.S., Kassing (1998) validated his 20-item scale that has been used to test a variety of hypotheses related to the practice of organizational dissent.

Even with the Organizational Dissent Scale, researchers have not identified specific demographic characteristics (such as sex or race) of a typical dissenter; however, scholars have begun to identify hidden traits that affect choices in expression. Employees with higher tendencies toward argumentativeness, lower tendencies toward communicative aggression (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999), higher levels of organization-based
self-esteem (Payne, 2007), and perceptions that their actions are significant in affecting change (Kassing & Avtgis, 2001) are most likely to use articulated dissent. These individuals can play a very important role in the organization, because they may pave the way for others to voice disagreement. While it is true that not all dissent may be helpful, it is equally important to recognize the potential power and fruitfulness of dissent insofar as voicing alternative views invites others in the workplace to think critically about their own perspectives (Perlow, 2003).

Yet, for the most part, the persistent organizational mantra of “not rocking the boat” relegates dissent to the corners of organizational awareness and dismisses it as distracting from and upsetting to the daily processes of organizations (Redding, 1985). Employers and employees alike may feel that dissent is inefficient, unproductive, and disloyal. Because such connotations are so deeply tied to the practice of dissent, it is necessary to further explore the challenges and barriers facing workplace dissenters.

Obstacles to Dissenting

Although dissent can be a beneficial form of organizational communication, the cultural perception of dissent, the structure of organizations, and the risks of retaliation are significant obstacles to dissenting. In U.S. and western European organizational cultures, part of that hesitance is likely related to western socialization. As children, people quickly learn that it is not in one’s best interest, socially speaking, to tattle (Miethe, 1999). The mass media, as well, often portray informants or snitches as self-serving sell-outs without loyalty (Miethe, 1999). Phillips (1996) suggested that the cultural emphasis on consensus has diminished the fruitful expression of dissent within
the public sphere, although others (Goodnight, 1999) may argue that uncertainty is at the core of all deliberation and decision making.

Within the context of organizations throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, companies have often operated under ideologies promoting a unitary system in the workplace (Maclagan, 1998), which does not encourage disagreement and recognizes it as a form of disunity. In addition, ideological frameworks such as Bendix's (1956) classical management only discuss communication from superiors to subordinates, never the reverse. While such perspectives have been widely challenged in the past 40 years (Gorden, 1988; Hirschman, 1970; Kassing, 2012), the ideologies about mandatory unity and/or employee voice have yet to shift completely.

An equally—if not more—important factor in the negative connotation attached to dissent is the fear of organizational retaliation. This problem is particularly troubling considering the documented (let alone undocumented) experiences of many employees (Gellert, 1981; Meithe, 1999; Perlow, 2003; Westin, 1981). For example, Gellert's (1981) autobiographical account demonstrates an instance of severe organizational retaliation. Gellert (1981) was an airline pilot who reported, through both internal articulated dissent and external whistleblowing, a mechanical issue on a series of airplanes in the late 1970s. Rather than addressing the mechanical problem, the airline suspended him without pay for more than a year. While Gellert was seeking custody of his children, the airline provided his ex-wife's attorney with a statement that the airline believed he was mentally unstable. In a published news article in the *Times of London*, an airline representative described him as “paranoid” (Gellert, 1981, p. 29). The pilot
was ultimately vindicated in court, but he suffered serious professional, economic, and social consequences for speaking up (Gellert, 1981).

As in Gellert’s example, organizations have not historically shown open acceptance of most dissent, particularly prior to the 1980s. Even today, filing legitimate grievances using the appropriate channels within an organization may lead to disciplinary actions in return for honest dissent. The residual effects of harassment, terminated employment, slanderous and libelous attacks, and financial ruin for employees are a considerable factor in dissuading internal dissent or external whistleblowing (Westin, 1981).

That said, the broader cultural acceptance of dissent has grown significantly since the 1970s (Lipman, 2012; Maclagan, 1998). Whistleblowers, in particular, have become more widely respected in the public sphere. For instance, *TIME Magazine*’s Persons of the Year in 2002 were “whistleblowers” (Kassing, 2012; Lacayo & Ripley, 2002). The magazine cover featured ENRON employee Sherron Watkins, FBI agent Coleen Rowley, and WorldCom accountant Cynthia Cooper: three women who reported abuse, fraud, or other wrongdoing in their organizations to outside authorities (Lacayo & Ripley, 2002). *TIME*’s depiction of their whistleblowing actions was heroic, particularly in light of the archetypal lone individual fighting against the giant corporation or agency. Here, commercial mass media are taking part in the effort to acknowledge whistleblowing as necessary, and dissent as a citizen’s duty. The law has joined in protecting whistleblowers as well. Employees now have more protection in their choice to report illegal happenings in their organizations, including the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform
and Consumer Protection Act, 2010 legislation seeking to reward whistleblowers for taking appropriate actions (Lipman, 2012).

In addition, Kassing’s (2001) survey findings support the idea that speaking up is becoming more widely accepted, at least in theory. In a cross-sectional study of employees in the Southwest United States, Kassing (2001) tested respondents’ reactions to fictional dissent scenarios. In one scenario, the dissenter expressed articulated upward dissent; in the other scenario, the dissenter expressed latent dissent to peer-level coworkers. The study showed that employees perceived the articulated dissenter as having a stronger relationship with his/her superior and being more satisfied at work (Kassing, 2001). It is good news that, at least in hypothetical situations, employees see the value of dissenting upwardly.

However, support for the concept of dissent does not make the process easier in the actual daily experiences of employees. In fact, in some organizations, fear of public exposure or other negative consequences can lead organizations to discourage employees voicing concerns (Lipman, 2012). At the very least, internal dissenters or whistleblowers are likely to experience social isolation in the workplace (Lipman, 2012). Fear of isolation is known to lead to a spiral of silence in interpersonal communication interactions (Noelle-Nuemann, 1984), because “no one wants to risk being ostracized or otherwise punished by the group” for expressing dissenting opinions (Perlow, 2003, p. 29). This fear may ultimately be reflected in the workplace when employees choose not to dissent.
Many organization members feel intense discomfort with the interpersonal conflict that may arise from open discussion of disagreement. Such discomfort is often a result of organizational norms, which value the speed of the decision-making process or unanimous agreement over deeper-level discussions (Perlow, 2003). In other cases, employees may express dissent only as grousing or venting “in the hallway, or around the water cooler, or behind closed doors—out of earshot of the person with whom they differ” in order to avoid direct conflict (Perlow, 2003, p. 4). Based on factors like the organizational environment, the likelihood of being perceived as a troublemaker, and the belief that speaking up will make a difference (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003), employees perform a sort of “mental calculus” to help them determine if and how they should speak up (Perlow, 2003, p. 26). More often than not, the solution to the equation is silence.

In short, employees may feel dissonance or guilt when they recognize their feelings of dissent, primarily because it is perceived as challenging organizational norms and, therefore, their loyalty to the organization (Redding, 1985). Employees' feelings of disloyalty and their fears of organizational retaliation or social isolation quite logically make them less likely to express dissent (Kassing, 2008). Thus, employees’ perceptions of organizational culture are deeply entwined with the perception of, attitude toward, and—ultimately—likelihood of voicing dissent.

**Organizational Culture and Dissent**

Because the experience of organizational dissent is so closely tied to daily work experiences in organizations, most dissent scholars acknowledge the role of
organizational culture in the choice to speak up. In Kassing’s (1997, 2012) dissent model, he describes organizational influences as a factor in employees’ dissent expression, including how tolerant their organization might be of dissent, as well as how they see their role in the organization.

More specifically, Hegstrom (1990) suggested that organizations tend to hold one of two conditions: the dissent condition or the mimetic condition. He proposed that the majority of organizations promote mimetic conditions, or imitation of the norms set forth by the top management (Hegstrom, 1990). Mimetic conditions silence and deny dissent and reaffirm organizational standards, signifying that dissent is neither useful nor welcome. Mimicry is contrasted with the dissent condition, or the granting of permission to dissent (Hegstrom, 1990).

The dissent condition is tied to freedom of speech in organizations (Garner, 2007). Quite logically, when employees perceive themselves as free to express thoughts or ideas in their organization, they are more likely to express dissent (Garner, 2007). Kassing’s (2000b) cross-sectional survey of employees in Arizona businesses supports this claim. Kassing (2000b) found that organizational identification and choices to express dissent varied in relationship to employees’ perceptions of their workplace freedom of speech in their organizations. If employees perceive their freedom of speech in the organization as high, they were more likely to have a higher level of organizational identification and choose to upwardly express dissent (Kassing, 2000b).

Hegstrom’s (1990) description of the mimetic and dissent conditions highlighted an important view of organizational culture. Most existing dissent literature approaches
organizational culture as reflecting a single, agreed upon view of dissent (Hegstrom, 1990; Kassing, 1998, 2000b). Viewing organizational culture as unified and integrated indicates organization-wide consensus, which is particularly popular from the perspective of organizational leaders as they hope to shape a single unified culture (Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993). However, it is probably not realistic to assume that organizations have a stable condition in relation to dissent (or any other issue).

For this reason, an alternative view of organizational cultures, the differentiated perspective, is relevant in this study. The differentiated perspective views organizational cultures as sharing consensus on the micro level, within subcultures, but not organization-wide (Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993). It may be helpful to adopt a differentiated perspective of organizational culture concerning dissent because that view highlights the inconsistencies between different levels or departments of the organization in the practice of certain cultural elements. Within the same organization, one department might maintain a dissent condition, while another department might evidence a mimetic condition. However, because most dissent research has adopted an integrated view of organizational culture, the nuance of organizational influences may not be accounted for in research without the benefit of immersion in a single culture to examine the possible presence of multiple conditions.

Just as an organization may show a complex system of mimetic and dissent conditions (Hegstrom, 1990), it may also be shaped by a difference between espoused values and actual values (Schein, 1999). Although an organization professes an openness to dissent, the practice of dismissing or punishing dissenters will indicate that the
organization actually values mimicry and passive agreement (Perlow, 2003), leaving employees to wrestle with just how honest to be in their dissent. Therefore, the communication actions of leaders become uniquely important in influencing an organizational culture toward dissent.

On all levels, organizational leaders’ verbal and nonverbal messages about, and responses to, dissent influence the perceived risk employees associate with it (Miethe, 1999). A cross-sectional survey of employees revealed that higher quality superior-subordinate relationships related to employees’ increased likelihood of sharing opinions, including dissent (Kassing, 2000a). In this way, organizational leaders do much to shape their employees’ perceptions of the organization’s attitude toward dissent.

The importance of organizational culture in the perceptions and experiences of dissent probably cannot be overstated. Without doubt, organizational cultures can often become “conducive” or “restrictive” to dissent (Kassing, 1998, p. 212). However, most organizations are not one or the other, but a combination of both. Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo (1982) borrow Geertz’s web metaphor to describe the enabling and constraining characteristics of organizational cultures. In a single organization, the culture may offer the opportunity to express dissenting views while also constraining the topic of dissent or the manner of speaking up. Just as dissent is imbedded in organizational culture, so too are perceptions of loyalty.

**Defining Loyalty at Work**

Loyalty in the workplace emerges as a function of organizational culture through the environment and expectations of the workplace. Therefore, loyalty becomes an
important facet of the organizational experience for all employees, and becomes a part of understanding workplace dissent. Much of the time, organizational loyalty is of interest only insofar as it serves to benefit the organization. The examination of supervisor loyalty (Xiong Chen, Tsui, & Farh, 2002) or departmental/professional commitment (Jauch, Glueck, & Osborn, 1978) has often related specifically to workplace productivity, while studies of customer loyalty (Kandampully, 1998) often relate to profitable business relationships. Specific examination of the theoretical and practical implications of dissent and loyalty has been left primarily to organizational culture scholars and business ethicists (Corvino, 2002; Duska, 1985; Larmer, 1992; Westin, 1981).

From the employee’s perspective, organizational loyalty lays the foundation for ethical, pragmatic, and sometimes conflict-ridden choices of employees in their decision to speak up. The previous discussion of organizational retaliation and social isolation are issues intimately related to the understanding of loyalty within an organization. Organizational culture scholars and business ethicists of the 1980s and 1990s attempted to explore the understandings of organizational loyalty in conversation with dissent.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing facets of loyalty is the way in which it is assumed to align only with compliance to organizational norms. In Martin and Siehl’s (1983) analysis of General Motors, they describe the cultural expectations of GM executives, like being met at the airport with an extensive entourage when returning from business travel. Their study focused on the countercultural actions of John DeLorean, who insisted that his subordinate workers not meet him at the airport and openly spoke critically about a number of organizational practices. DeLorean, and several other
employees, were not considered good members of the organizational team, because they did not demonstrate loyalty by affirming the organizational practices (Martin & Siehl, 1983). Organizational studies of this nature demonstrate the assumption that loyalty means conforming to organizational practices, making it clear that dissenting actions could be labeled disloyal in such contexts.

Furthermore, loyalty in the workplace fits well in conversation with the concept of organizational identification. Traditional understandings of organizational identification have included terms such as loyalty and commitment in determining an individual’s feeling of “oneness with the organization” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 103); such perspectives are clearly organization-centered. However, Morgan et al. (2004) suggested that individuals have several sources of identification that influence their experience inside and outside of the workplace. The recognition of a similar diversity of loyalties is absent from the scholarly discussion.

From the business ethics perspective, the loyalty of dissenters and whistleblowers has been continuously questioned, under the assumption that an employee had a prima facie obligation to organizational loyalty that would be disrupted by whistleblowing (Duska, 1985). Since that time, dissent has been rearticulated, with new definitions acknowledging that dissent may involve negative or counter-cultural views that are, in fact, fruitful. Duska’s (1985) widely-cited essay boldly countered the criticism of dissenters’ disloyalty by proposing that organizations are not appropriate objects of loyalty to begin with. He claimed that loyalty “necessarily requires that we go beyond self-interests,” and that such self-sacrifice does not exist and is not possible for an
organization (Duska, 1985, p. 297). Because organizations are not appropriate objects of loyalty, the whistleblower or dissenter should not be viewed as disloyal by her or his actions. Duska (1985) calls this the "cold hard truth" that "loyalty to a corporation . . . is not required" and is "probably misguided" (p. 298).

However, employees often do hold loyalty to their organizations. Larmer (1992) claimed that such loyalty may not be inappropriate, because loyalty is not necessarily defined by reciprocation. Although an organization itself cannot return interpersonal loyalty, it is not an inappropriate object of loyalty by default (Larmer, 1992). Many times, in fact, people practice loyalty toward other individuals, teams, municipal entities, and nations that do not and cannot reciprocate in the traditional sense. As such, it is "not nonsense to suppose that loyalty may be appropriate even though it is not reciprocated" (Larmer, 1992, p. 126). Furthermore, loyalty should not be dismissed on the basis of economic interest, because "it seems wrong to suggest that simply because the primary motivation of the employer is economic, considerations of loyalty are irrelevant" (Larmer, 1992, p. 126). It is certainly true that both parties (employer and employee) have a primarily economic interest in each other, yet both can practice consideration and loyalty for one another in a genuine concern for general welfare.

Further supporting this argument, some scholars (Corvino, 2002; Vandekerckhove & Commers, 2004) suggest that loyalty toward an organization is neither impossible nor inappropriate: It simply requires a new perspective of what loyalty is. Corvino (2002) argued that "while loyalty requires a certain degree of tolerance for shortcomings, it does not require absolute or complete tolerance" (p. 184). This perspective allows for the
fruitful and loyal action of dissent to improve shortcomings, as Hirschman (1970) proposed.

To this end, ethicists have argued that employees willing to dissent show the most loyalty to their organizations (Larmer, 1992; Maclagan, 1998). Just as a friend who intervenes in a concerning situation, "the employee who blows the whistle may be demonstrating greater loyalty than the employee who simply ignores the immoral conduct, inasmuch as she [or he] is attempting to prevent her [or his] employer from engaging in self-destructive behavior" (Larmer, 1992, p. 127).

In the on-going ethical and theoretical arguments about loyalty and dissent, it is clear that a strong argument can be made for the loyalty of workplace dissenters. The ever unstated element of these arguments is to whom the dissenter is being loyal. It is assumed that dissent can be loyal (or disloyal) to the organization. That is, evidently, the primary concern of the scholars cited here. I maintain, however, that dissent may still be considered loyal when practiced for the sake of people or entities other than the organization. For example, even though dissent voiced for the rights or interests of clients, customers, or patients may not yield immediate or direct benefits for the organization, it certainly illustrates a high level of workplace loyalty. Conversely, the decision to not speak up (perhaps prompted by past instances of organizational retaliation) may be an act of loyalty from an employee dedicated to maintaining an income needed to support a partner, family, or parent.

Thus, I identify a difference between the terms organizational loyalty and loyalty in the workplace. The discussions of Corvino (2002), Duska (1985), Larmer (1992), and
Westin (1981) focus only on the one-directional loyalty from the employee to the organization. Such a definition misses the vital importance of the question to what or to whom are you being loyal by assuming a single, unchanging recipient. I propose that loyalty in the workplace does not end with the loyalty expressed or exhibited toward the organization. In every moment of the work experience, the employee, as a complex human being, is constantly balancing multiple loyalties: loyalty to a client, loyalty to a community, loyalty to a partner and/or family. Although personal loyalties (e.g., family, economic stability, internal values) are often considered irrelevant to explorations of loyalty in the workplace, or discredited as loyalties at all, I argue that they are valid forms of loyalty worth considering in the study of organizational dissent as they motivate and influence the choices dissenters make.

The exploration of dissent through this broader definition of loyalty has not been addressed in existing quantitative or qualitative research, perhaps because it calls for analysis of underlying and nuanced motivations for communication that often go uninvestigated, even (and perhaps especially) by the organizational members. But, the importance of the complex relationship between dissent and loyalty is significant and the need for research attempting to address it is clear.

**Conclusion**

Based on a review of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, several clear arguments emerge about the nature of organizational dissent. Certainly, disagreement can be a fruitful and beneficial form of communication within organizations. As a
mechanism for positive change (Hirschman, 1970), dissent gives voice to employees allowing for honest discussion of problems and solutions.

While dissent is highly valued in theory (Hirschman, 1970; Kassing, 2012; Maclagan, 1998), the negative connotations attached to speaking up often silence dissenters. Historically, organizational cultures have deemed dissent unhelpful (Redding, 1985), and instances of organizational retaliation continue to promote fear of voicing concerns (Westin, 1981). These very real dangers lead to employees’ hesitation to speak up. Although employee voice may be considered a right within organizations (Seeger, 1997; Werhane et al., 2004), practicing that right comes with social risks that may never be accounted for in mediated appeals or litigation. This web of negative connotations continues to shape the way employees understand and perceive workplace dissent.

A major factor in the negative connotations attached to dissent is its association with disloyalty. Several business ethicists (Corvino, 2002; Duska, 1985; Larmer, 1992) have sought to validate dissenting behavior as loyal to the organization. I agree with the argument that dissent can be loyal to an organization, but I further contend that the understanding of workplace loyalty would benefit from reexamination. Loyalty exists beyond the single dimension of employee-to-organization discussed in existing literature. In fact, loyalties in the workplace encompass any number of personal and professional dedications that influence an employee’s choices and behaviors in the workplace, most occurring on a level that is uninterrogated in their daily work experiences.

The scholarly works tying dissent to loyalty are solely theoretical explanations. Such explanations are helpful, but examination of practical experience in light of those
frameworks would further inform dissent research. In contrast, most of the empirical dissent research is quantitative, cutting across a variety of workplaces and industries (Kassing, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2008, 2011). Although dissent scholars have acknowledged the important role of organizational culture in the practice of dissent (Hegstrom, 1990; Kassing, 1997, 1998), quantitative studies are not able to account for culture or examine dissent experiences in light of culture. For this reason, my research consists of qualitative data seeking to explore the underlying perceptions of loyalty that shape workplace dissent in a large healthcare organization’s radiology department. To begin this work, I developed the following research questions to focus this study on the understanding of employees’ actual experiences of workplace dissent.

RQ1: What motivates people to dissent in a particular way?

RQ2: How do employees perceive other organizational members’ dissent?

RQ3: How does loyalty in the workplace within this organizational culture influence employees’ perceptions of dissent?
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Because the goal of this research is to explore the underlying motivations of dissent as related to loyalty in the workplace, I find it appropriate to use an inductive approach to data collection and analysis. Therefore, I have selected qualitative methods, using individual interviews of employees in a single organization to begin an exploratory conversation about why and how dissent manifests and how employees understand dissent in the workplace. I provide a complete description of the methods used in this research by discussing the research site, the data collection process, the participants in the study, the data analysis process, and the theoretical frameworks employed.

Research Site

Because I collected interviews from a single workplace, this research is deeply entwined with the rich environment of the organization I examined. I begin by explaining the process of securing an appropriate research site for this study. Then, I discuss the important background information about the research site that influences the culture of the organization, as evident in the data I collected.

Although no part of the research process could be safely described as “easy,” the process of securing an organization for this study was particularly challenging. In my search for a research site, I approached several organizations representing industries such as healthcare, finance, manufacturing, and education. Because of other research commitments or a lack of interest, two organizations rejected my proposal to conduct research in their workplaces. The difficulty in finding a cooperating organization may be
due, at least in part, to the sensitivity and negative connotation of dissent at work. The third organization I contacted, a hospital, initially turned down the research proposal as well. However, after a follow-up meeting with two of the organization’s senior leaders, the third organization agreed to work with me as a cooperating site for this research, allowing me to examine the hospital’s department of radiology.

This hospital’s radiology department served as a rich and fruitful research site, particularly because of the size of the organization, the hierarchical structure, and the recent events employees faced. The radiology director, whom I will call Christine, was my primary contact with the organization. Christine is the head of radiology for three hospitals within a fifty mile radius, all of which are operated by the same large healthcare provider. In total, the department of radiology consists of approximately 100 employees at three locations. Hospital X is the largest of the three hospitals; approximately 80 radiology employees work at that site, and it serves as Christine’s primary location. Hospital Y is located in a neighboring city; approximately 15 radiology employees work at this site. Hospital Z is located about 50 miles from Hospitals X and Y in a small, rural town. Six employees work in radiology at the Hospital Z location.

The department of radiology maintains a strong hierarchical structure. Within the department of radiology, employees provide a system of unique radiology-related services to patients. These niche areas are described as modalities, and include functions such as X-ray, ultra sound, nuclear medicine, and MRI, as well as administrative support staff. The largest modality has 15 employees, and the smallest has five employees. Technologists work directly with the patients, taking X-rays or performing studies and
tests. Transcriptionists, receptions, sorters, and transporters represent the support staff for technologists and physicians to complete studies and work with patients. Technologists and support staff form the base of the hierarchy. Employees in each modality report to a supervisor, who is responsible for inspections and daily work functions. Most modality supervisors are "working supervisors"; they perform technologist duties in the call rotation in addition to maintaining their leadership roles. Supervisors from several modality areas report to managers, whose duties include overseeing the quality of patient care and work processes in the department. Christine, the director of radiology, oversees the radiology employees at all three hospital sites, including managers, supervisors, technologists, and support staff. The other major leadership role related to the department is the radiologist team. This team of physicians works directly with all job roles in the department. In the larger context of the healthcare field, the physicians tend to maintain the highest status and the most control; participants indicated this status/power imbalance holds true in the radiology department.

In the radiology department, like in all healthcare environments, the employees serve patients rather than clients. Because patients are often ill or injured, and therefore vulnerable, the role of healthcare professionals often involves legal and ethical responsibilities for patients' protection, privacy, and care. In the radiology department, actions like sharing patients' test results or altering patients' files and images would violate the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), which requires all healthcare workers to protect patient privacy (Kulynych & Korn, 2003). In addition, healthcare employees, including the staff members in this department, are
expected to offer care, compassion, and reassurance to patients, which often involves emotional labor as part of the work role (James, 1992).

In addition to the general structure and context of the radiology department, two major events have influenced the culture of the department of radiology in the two years prior to data collection. A significant change in leadership occurred two years before I began collecting data, wherein Christine became the director of radiology. The previous director of radiology had served in his leadership role for seven years, at which point an employee in the department came forward articulating concerns to other leaders within the department about the director's unethical practices; court cases are pending. Participants' narratives indicated that the unethical practices may have compromised patient care. In this way, the dissenting employee took on the role of a patient advocate in speaking up on behalf of the patients served by the department (Hyland, 2002; Willard, 1996). After the employee voiced the concerns, the former director resigned and Christine took his place. In addition, a new group of radiologist physicians was hired, and the expectations of employees in the department increased, according to several participants.

In addition to this change in leadership, which affected all three hospitals, another conflict in leadership occurred at Hospital Z. One year before data collection, Hospital Z, the smallest care center, located in a rural area, closed several programs under the direction of the larger healthcare organization. Several organization members at Hospital Z (not limited to radiology employees) loudly voiced concerns with the larger healthcare organization's approach to managing their smaller facility. The senior leaders of the
health care organization, which oversees about twelve hospitals throughout the Midwest, provided an ultimatum to Hospital Z: the community could purchase the facility, or dissenting employees could abide by the decisions of the healthcare organization's leadership. The community was unable to purchase the hospital within the timeframe provided. Therefore, Hospital Z remains under the leadership of the larger healthcare organization; however, discontent continues among some employees.

Clearly, this research site provided rich context for the study of dissent at work. The large size of the department, the hierarchical structure, and the major events facing the employees offered an opportunity to explore a variety of facets of organizational dissent and loyalty. The data collection process allowed me to begin understanding employees' perceptions, motivations, and experiences within this context.

Data Collection and Participants

To understand the underlying and nuanced motivations and perceptions of loyalty and dissent, I used an inductive approach through qualitative methods because it seemed the most appropriate fit for my research goals. When selecting the type of data collection, I considered the nature of the topic and the nature of the research site. The topic of dissent carries a definite negative connotation, and also relates closely to the interpersonal relationships the employees maintain. It also invites the participants to engage in reflection or retrospective sensemaking about their own experiences of disagreement. Because my approach to this topic involves personal descriptions of motivations and perceptions, focus group interviewing would have run the risk of making employees feel uncomfortable discussing their coworkers' behavior in a group setting. In
addition, field observations would not allow for direct discussion of dissent experiences or the sensemaking involved in choices to dissent or remain silent. Although both methods would certainly be appropriate for a different sort of exploration of this topic, my research questions were better answered through individual interviews. In addition, the confidential nature of one-on-one interviews allowed the employees to express their views candidly with an outsider (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

In developing the interview protocol, I focused on three primary areas driven by my research questions. The first section explored the participants’ own experiences of and motivations for dissent, the second section asked about their perceptions of other employees’ dissent, and the final section related to the understanding of loyalty in the workplace and its relationship to dissent. Throughout the interview protocol, and during the interviews, I used alternate terms to describe dissent, including disagreement, speaking up, and voicing concerns. Using alternate terms often helped focus the participants in the neighborhood of dissent-related events, without calling on them to overtly identify their experiences as dissent.

After establishing an interview protocol and negotiating with the organization for possible data collection arrangements, I received Institutional Review Board approval for this project. I made three options for data collection available to participants: I offered to schedule off-site meetings that would not occur during work time, I offered on-site interviews at Hospital X wherein employees could interview during downtime at work, and I offered phone interviews during work time or outside of work time. The director assisted in recruiting participants by reading a recruitment script (that contained a
schedule of on-site interview availability) to employees, publishing a recruitment script via email and in the department newsletters, and posting it in the hallways. One employee chose to interview over the phone, the rest of the employees chose to interview on-site. Interviews were held in private offices and classrooms at Hospital X.

Over the course of three weeks, I spent 45 hours in the private areas of Hospital X, where I was available for interviews with employees. In total, seventeen employees participated in the study. The participants represented all work roles and job levels; I interviewed the director, one manager, six supervisors, seven technologists, and two members of support staff. These employees represented five modality areas (e.g. ultrasound, X-ray, MRI) as well as administrative staff and leadership work roles. Tenure of employment with the hospital system ranged from one year to 40 years, with only five participants employed for less than 10 years. Four of the participants were men; 13 were women. Sixteen of the participants were white; one was Indian. The interviews were audio recorded and ranged in length from 12 minutes to 52 minutes with a median time of about 25 minutes. I transcribed interviews verbatim, yielding 98 pages of single-spaced interview transcripts. All names and locations have been removed, and names have been replaced with pseudonyms in the analysis and interpretation section. In addition to using the data for this thesis project, I also prepared a summary report for the organization in which the data were stripped of all identifiers and reported in the aggregate.

Data Analysis

I used a grounded theory approach to analyze the interview transcripts, because it allowed for the emergent relationships between data to determine the pertinent theoretical
and practical insights (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Because few studies have asked about the relationship between dissent and loyalty, and no empirical inquiries have examined the topic, the grounded theory approach allowed for the open-ended and nuanced analysis I sought with this research.

The first step in the grounded theory approach is the "unrestricted coding of data" during the open coding process (Strauss, 1987, p. 28). In order to establish the general codes used in this initial process, I used Owen’s (1984) suggestion of finding data that repeated, recurred, and were forceful. Concepts that appeared multiple times, either using the same language (repeating) or similar language (recurring), tended to represent important preliminary groupings. Thus, I began by identifying the four broadest categories of content discussed by participants, and I grouped participant data according to those broad categories.

After grouping together data that represented categories, the preliminary categories began to evolve as relationships emerged between different pieces of narrative data. Throughout the process of analyzing data, I used the constant-comparative method to explore the data in conversation with each other, and with my interpretation of their meaning (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). This axial coding process resulted in the realigning and collapsing of existing themes, as well as the formation of a new theme. Within each theme, the process of analysis allowed me to examine the implications and insights of the participants’ words, and I found several distinct facets within each theme. Ultimately, I organized the data into three themes with three
subthemes in each area. I arranged the themes in the most logical fashion, and I then began to articulate the analysis and interpretation of data.

Theoretical Frameworks

Although I adopted a grounded theory approach to data analysis, which focuses on the concepts emerging organically from the data, I recognize that I was guided by three theoretical frameworks. First, Hirschman's (1970) theory of exit-voice-loyalty, including Farrell's (1983) fourth dimension of neglect, shaped my approach to this work. These models assume loyalty, voice, and neglect to be separate and indicative of specific actions. I contend that the dimension of loyalty should be considered in a broader sense, as a complex facet of employees' workplace communication decision making.

I also utilized Kassing's (1997, 2012) model of dissent. His categorization of the types of dissent (articulated, latent, and displaced) provided an appropriate vocabulary to discuss dissent scenarios. Additionally, the components of Kassing's (1997, 2012) dissent model presented the clearest view of how dissent takes shape, and it offered a useful guide for this research.

Finally, I found Hegstrom's (1990) description of mimetic or dissent conditions in organizations helpful in describing the organizational reaction to dissent. The importance of the role of organizational culture in dissent is profound, and Hegstrom's (1990) vocabulary is useful in comparing the types of environments and their implications.

These three theoretical frameworks shaped my understanding of the concept of dissent, but none of these theoretical views demanded a certain interpretation of the data. Therefore, I did not impose these theories on the data I collected; rather, I examined the
data openly using a grounded theory methodology and then put my findings in conversation with the content of these theories. With the use of the methods described in this chapter, I describe my findings in Chapter 4.

To begin, I discuss participants' narratives about workplace loyalty, including their descriptions of four specific dimensions of loyalty. Then, using the descriptions of loyalty, I analyze and interpret the participants' dissent stories in light of their perceptions and motivations. Finally, I address the participants' overt statements describing the relationship between loyalty and dissent as beneficial, antagonistic, or complex.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Through a grounded theory approach to data analysis, three themes emerged from
the data in this study. The first theme represents the participants’ descriptions of loyalties
in the workplace, the second theme addresses the participants’ narratives of dissent
experiences, and the third theme explores participants’ views of the relationship between
loyalty and dissent. The analysis and interpretation of data answers the research
questions posed in this study by addressing how employees view their own dissent,
others’ dissent, and loyalty in their workplace as a part of the choice to dissent.

The participants described their definitions of loyalty in the workplace by
discussing four dimensions of loyalty: organizational loyalty, coworker loyalty, patient
loyalty, and personal loyalty. In addition, I found a distinct difference between
participant narratives that conflated all types of loyalty in the workplace into
organizational loyalty, and those that clearly differentiated the types of loyalty they
experience at work. Employees also described reciprocation as a complex facet of their
loyalty experiences.

Using the four dimensions of loyalty as a framework, I apply the lens of loyalty to
the employees’ narratives of dissent experiences. Although the participants seldom made
direct connections between loyalty and motivations for dissent, the evidence that loyalties
motivated the act of speaking up is clear. I analyze the participants’ narratives in terms
of their perceptions of leaders’ response to dissent, their peers’ actions of dissent, and
their own actions of dissent. In different ways and to different degrees, loyalties play an important role in understanding the participants' dissent stories.

While the second theme uses a lens of loyalty to understand the participants' dissent experiences, the third theme involves the participants' direct discussion of the relationship between dissent and loyalty. Some employees viewed the relationship as a mutually beneficial one; others viewed it as antagonistic. Most frequently, however, participants described the relationship between loyalty and dissent as complex because of the diversity of loyalties within and between organizational members, making dissent a particularly unique and powerful form of communication.

**Defining Loyalty in the Workplace: The Dimensions of Loyalty**

The first step toward exploring the role of loyalty in the motivations and perceptions of dissent is understanding how these employees viewed loyalty in the workplace. The participants' narratives uncovered interpretations and perceptions of their own loyalties as well as the organizational and societal expectations of loyalty in the workplace. Without a doubt, the participants in this study acknowledged that multiple loyalties exist in the workplace. Most employees' narratives identified four dimensions of loyalty within their work experiences: organizational, coworker, patient, and personal loyalty (e.g., partner, family, personal beliefs, advancement). Interestingly, the participants indicated two major trends in how they understood those loyalties: either as a conflation of all types of loyalty, or as differentiated and compartmentalized loyalties. In addition, the employees' perceptions of loyalties seem to be strongly influenced by the reciprocation of loyalty they feel entitled to or that they feel they are given by their
organization. The difference in understanding loyalty in the workplace as conflated or differentiated, along with the understanding of reciprocated loyalty, becomes important insofar as it serves the perceptions and understandings of dissent as loyal or disloyal.

Conflating Loyalties in the Workplace

It would be fair to suggest that the usual illustration of loyalty in the workplace is aligned solely with organizational loyalty, as described in Chapter 2. Typically, such loyalty involves longevity of employment, intention to stay with the organization, and satisfaction with the employment experience. Janet, a manager and 40-year employee of Hospital X, identified herself as having this type of loyalty in the workplace. She noted, “I’ve been here a long time and there’s something that keeps me here, you know. And it’s not always been easy, and sometimes it’s been darn hard, and there’s been a lot of sleepless nights, just like any other job or environment that you’re in. But there’s something that keeps me coming back.” For Janet, loyalty in the workplace begins and ends with loyalty to Hospital X. While she did not ignore the challenges of the workplace, she illustrated her loyalty by “coming back,” accounting for her long tenure and indicating that she intended to remain with the hospital. Janet framed loyalty to the hospital as her central workplace loyalty, and within that central loyalty all other loyalties are subsumed.

Like Janet, other employees who conflated loyalties believed that patient loyalty and coworker loyalty were a necessary part of expressing loyalty to the hospital at large. Several participants indicated that loyalty in the workplace means simply “doing a good job,” and when pressed further they suggested that this meant completing work
responsibly, showing respect to coworkers, and attending to patients with appropriate care. For example, Joan, a 35-year veteran supervisor, explained loyalty in the workplace: “it’s not just the system that you are being loyal to. To me, it’s more of a personal thing . . . you want to take care of your patients the best way you possibly can. It makes you feel good about yourself and just to do the best job you can.” By first saying that “it’s not just the system you are being loyal to,” Joan indicated her assumption that loyalty to the system is the primary loyalty in the workplace. Within loyalty to the system, Joan described the need for patient loyalty, along with personal loyalty like self-improvement.

Similarly, 10-year employee and support staff member Kim suggested that loyalty at work means “being loyal to the company, looking out best for them.” By way of example, Kim said employees in her department were adopting new schedules to accommodate departmental needs. She viewed the schedule change as “trying to cover extra hours because it’s better for the company, better for the patients, things are getting done, and filling in where needed because that’s what’s best, not just best for me, but best for being loyal.” Kim indicated that organizational loyalty will necessarily involve coworker and patient loyalty, and may involve some level of self-sacrifice. Both Joan and Kim described loyalty to the hospital as the single, central loyalty in the workplace. Although Joan and Kim could identify these loyalties as distinct, they were typically conflated into the single notion of organizational loyalty.

It is important to note that participants who tended to conflate loyalties adamantly identified themselves as loyal to the organization. When all of the loyalty associations
the employees experienced were self-identified as positive, they described all of their
loyalties at work by explaining that they were “loyal to Hospital X.” Because these
employees viewed loyalty to Hospital X as a positive thing (as compared with negative
disloyalty), it was directly associated with positive loyalties toward coworkers, patients,
and personal concerns. However, when employees held different levels of loyalty within
different dimensions (e.g., not feeling loyalty to Hospital X), they tended not to conflate,
and rather differentiated, their workplace loyalties.

Differentiating Workplace Loyalties

While some employees identified organizational loyalty as encompassing all of
the multiple loyalties active in the workplace, the majority of participants specifically
drew attention to the different types of loyalties they experience at work. Commonly, the
differentiation of loyalties was rooted in the participant disassociating her- or himself
with one form of loyalty, but associating her- or himself with another form of loyalty.
Thus, some employees illustrated the way in which one can feel and act loyal in some
dimensions of loyalty and not others.

Sheri, a technologist with a 16-year tenure at Hospital X, clearly described the
diversity of loyalties she feels at work. She said:

I love my job, it gives me a lot of pleasure to work and do patient care and meet
the patient, and do my job well. It gives me a lot of pleasure. And I have some
wonderful colleagues, which makes things ok. Um, I don’t know about my
loyalty to the organization. That I wouldn’t put it high, because I’ve had some
experiences, which, um, don’t make me feel I should be super loyal . . . Things
have happened that . . . they don’t value your years of service. I believe I have
been treated unfairly many times. I think we’re all disposable.
Sheri specifically separated patient loyalty, coworker loyalty, and organizational loyalty as different things. She indicated a high level of loyalty to patients and her work role, a moderate level of loyalty to her coworkers, and a low level of loyalty to the organization. Sheri’s positive and negative experiences seemed to cause her to separate workplace loyalties rather than conflate them. For Sheri, because of unfair treatment and not feeling valued, she described her level of organizational loyalty as low. However, that low level of loyalty does not keep her from having high levels of loyalty toward patients, enjoying her job, and intending to continue working for Hospital X. Like Sheri, other employees who described a low level of loyalty to the organization indicated that they felt “disposable,” “replaceable,” or that the organization can “throw you out at any time.” Feeling un- or underappreciated by the organization and feeling a low level of job security often related to employees describing low levels of loyalty to the organization, while continuing to indicate high levels of loyalty toward patient care or coworker relationships.

In other cases, participants differentiated the variety of loyalties they experience at work in a way that was not fueled by any negative experiences or low levels of loyalty. Laura is a supervisor at Hospital Z, the rural acute care facility, where she has worked for 19 years. She explained loyalty in the workplace as a broadly defined attitude. She explained:

I always prefer to try to come in and, you know, what can I do to try to be helpful? Not always to my patients, not always to my coworkers, but to anyone I interact with. It’s not so much about, “I’ve worked at Hospital Z for nineteen years, and I’ll never work anywhere else, and I’m never going to leave because any other hospital doesn’t count.” Loyalty doesn’t mean that to me. It just means being present in whatever you’re trying to do today.
Because Laura defined loyalty as "being present" in her work role, she saw it as involving distinct loyalties to patients and coworkers. Yet, she clearly separated the longevity and pride in a specific workplace from her definition of loyalty. Laura's emphasis on interpersonal loyalty indicated that she is dedicated to the people she interacts with (both coworkers and patients) and the successful completion of work functions, but she does not consider broad organizational loyalty, as it is typically defined, a fundamental part of her loyalty experience.

Throughout the employees' narratives, it became clear that participants tended to view patient loyalty and coworker loyalty as far more common feelings of loyalty in the workplace than broad organizational loyalty. Every employee interviewed indicated patient care was one of their primary concerns and motivations, and thus the most prominent loyalty in the workplace. In this way, the healthcare context is slightly different from other organizational contexts, where loyalty to the customer or client might be viewed differently than loyalties to patient health and safety. As Norm, a 32-year veteran supervisor, explained, "If you talk to any healthcare provider or anybody else, you ask them why they are in the field, and they say, because I like to help people. I want to care for people." This desire to serve patients was echoed by 17-year employee and supervisor Nick, who described patient care as "number one without question in most people's minds." Because of the prevalence and emphasis of patient care in participants' responses, patient loyalty emerged as a uniquely uncontested loyalty in this study.

Only slightly less prevalent was the participants' descriptions of coworker relationships as a significant loyalty in the workplace. Most employees considered it
their responsibility to foster good relationships with their coworkers, like three year support staff member Mary Anne who described loyalty as “how dedicated are you not just to your job, but to the people you work with, because a job’s a job no matter where you go or what you do.” By saying that “a job is a job no matter where you go,” Mary Anne indicated that there is no inherent loyalty in the workplace, and that loyalty is created through interpersonal relationships, which are built and maintained by the employees through their daily interactions. Similarly, new technologist Carrie associated loyalty with “forming strong bonds with your coworkers, and kind of going above and beyond to help them out.” While Carrie had been employed at Hospital X for just one year, she said she felt strong loyalty toward the employees in her modality.

In general, when employees talked about loyalty to their coworkers, they went on to define “coworkers” as the five to fifteen people who worked in their modality area. For example, two year technologist Abby said, “It’s just about being loyal to your department specifically. . . And then there’s loyalty to Hospital X, but that’s more difficult just because it’s so big. I think it’s easier with like my modality [and] then radiology.” Abby illustrated the trend that interpersonal bonds were strong within the small modality areas, moderate with coworkers in the broader department of radiology, and weak with others in the hospital (e.g., floor nurses, physicians). Even within the single dimension of coworker loyalty, employees indicated the differentiations between the types of others with whom they interact and the corresponding levels of loyalty they feel toward those people.
Less frequently, participants mentioned personal loyalties as a part of their loyalties in the workplace. Some employees mentioned a partner or children as people to whom they are loyal at work because their jobs “put food on the tables,” and their supporting income allows them to provide for their families. Personal loyalties also related to advancement, certifications, development, and other forms of self-actualization that are tied to the employees’ work roles and jobs. Although most employees did not make overt mention of their personal loyalties in the workplace, discussions of family, education, or personal development often stemmed directly from the employees’ loyalties to their personal concerns. In addition, issues related to ethical behavior and appropriate conduct are often shaped by personal loyalties; one’s behavior or choices often reflect a loyalty to certain values or tenets of belief. Jamie, a supervisor employed at Hospital X for three years, described personal loyalties as one of the many dimensions of loyalty he brings with him to work. He said:

There’s loyalty to your associates, loyalty to your boss, loyalty to the patients, loyalty to the organization, loyalty to yourself, loyalty to your family, to the community. They are all different, and they all need to be exceptional as far as I’m concerned. But at the same time, some of those loyalties cross paths, and you have to decide which way to go at a certain point in time. And right or wrong, it’s probably going to come back to your own loyalties in the end. Where do my loyalties lie? My loyalties lie mostly to myself, my God, my morals, my family, that’s going to take precedence over loyalties to a coworker, to anyone, to any organization, which I believe is how it should be, or else what are we living for?

Interestingly, Jamie acknowledged not only the multiplicity of loyalties he balances at work, but also the ways in which those loyalties can interact and “cross paths” with each other. He primarily equated personal loyalty with values, morals, and family, explaining why that loyalty would serve as a central motivator for decision making. Particularly
important is Jamie’s final question “or else what are we living for?” In that phrase, Jamie drew attention to the importance of life outside of the office walls, and the value of feeling as though one’s decisions in the workplace align with one’s personal ethics. While often overlooked or considered something that does not or should not be a dimension of loyalty in the workplace, personal loyalties present a clear example of an important underlying loyalty that works in concert with other loyalties in many workplace scenarios.

Unlike the employees who see all types of loyalty under the umbrella of organizational loyalty, more than half of the participants (about 10) differentiated the types of loyalties they experience in the workplace. By separating the types and levels of loyalties they hold, the employees illustrated the ways in which an employee can demonstrate loyalty in one dimension but not another, while still ethically and appropriately meeting job expectations. All of the employees indicated that loyalty to the patients was necessary and was part of his or her workplace experience. Nearly all participants indicated that coworker loyalty was a priority, specifically within their small modality groups. Frequently, organizational loyalty was separated from the other types of loyalty. Sometimes employees made this distinction because organizational loyalty was considered less important. In other cases, employees felt that they had received poor treatment from the organization, making their feelings of loyalty and dedication to the larger healthcare organization very low. Thus far, the narratives of the participants have drawn from their articulations of their own feelings of loyalty; however, the expectations
of reciprocated workplace loyalty play an equally important role in understanding the nuances of workplace dissent.

Reciprocating Loyalties in the Workplace

In traditional interpersonal contexts, loyalty and reciprocation of loyalty generally work hand-in-hand. My loyalty to a friend is shaped by that person’s behavior and loyalty toward me. However, reciprocation in a workplace setting may function differently. Because reciprocation is central to shaping perceptions and understandings of loyalty, I look at the four primary loyalties emergent in this work (organizational loyalty, coworker loyalty, patient loyalty, personal loyalty) as they relate to reciprocation.

Employees described the actions of loyalty they expect from their organization as primarily contractual elements, like “that my paycheck is good,” and “that hopefully there’s some sense of job security.” Some employees believe that because the organization is not a person, the interpersonal qualities of traditional reciprocal loyalty do not fit the expectations of organizational loyalty. Suzy, a technologist with a tenure of 25 years at Hospital X, described her reciprocal loyalty with the organization by saying, “They have laid out what I need to do as an employee, and I follow those guidelines, so I don’t feel like my job is in jeopardy. So, in that sense, I think they maintain their end of the bargain, and I maintain mine.” In Suzy’s description, loyalty is clearly a contractual agreement between the organization and the employee. The loyalty of the organization is simply following through on the terms and conditions, just as the employee must follow through on the work expectations. However, if employees do not believe that their organization is fair in job security or wage, loyalty to the organization is unlikely, just as
Sheri said she was not loyal to the organization because “they don’t respect your years of service.”

For some employees, however, completing the contractual agreement does not necessarily equate to organizational loyalty. Abby, a technologist at Hospital X for two years, explained her uncertainty about organizational loyalty:

When there’s this many employees, what is Hospital X? You know? Like honestly, who is the face of Hospital X? Who is loyal to me? I don’t know. I appreciate my job, but I wouldn’t say that Hospital X is loyal to me by any means. That might be terrible to say, but they don’t know me, they don’t know what I do. They supply me with my paycheck and benefits, but they don’t know every individual employee. I’m replaceable, that’s for sure. Our field’s tight, so I’m easily replaceable. But I love my job. I just don’t know about loyalty, you know what I mean?

Abby openly acknowledged that she feels very little loyalty toward Hospital X, and does not believe that the organization holds loyalty toward her. Although she described the organization’s completion of the work contract (“they supply me with my paycheck and benefits”), she does not consider a reliable contractual agreement the same as loyalty. In this way, Abby seems to consider loyalty in the traditional, interpersonal sense, rather than the contractual sense. In addition, Abby does not seem to believe she has (or is owed) job security, and she considers herself “replaceable” in the organization’s eyes. Perhaps most importantly, Abby seemed to apologize for suggesting that her organization doesn’t hold loyalty to her when she says “that might be terrible to say.” Evidently, she believed that she should defend her organization’s loyalty to her (perhaps to not seem disloyal herself), but that did not prevent her from explaining, without malice or accusation, that there is no interpersonal loyalty between her and the organization.
In this way, both Duska’s (1985) proposal that organizational loyalty is not interpersonal and Larmer’s (1992) suggestion that it need not be are supported by different participant narratives in this research. If loyalty is understood as continuous successful completion of the work contract, fair wage, and job security, then most participants agree that their organization is loyal. However, if loyalty is described as interpersonal trust, this organization would likely not be capable of meeting such expectations.

The second dimension, coworker loyalty, fits much more closely with the traditional interpersonal understanding of loyalty. Participants described interpersonal loyalty as believing their coworkers would “take my back no matter what,” as technologist Abby said. Characteristics like trust and honesty were often associated with strong coworker loyalty, just as they would be in any interpersonal relationship.

Patient loyalties, the third dimension of workplace loyalty, is far less complex than other forms of loyalty. This loyalty is not related to reciprocation. Regardless of how a patient treats an employee, the employee retains a legal and ethical obligation to protect and advocate for the patient. Although there are some implications in terms of emotional labor performance in healthcare (James, 1992), loyalty is appropriate and necessary for all patients regardless of reciprocation, which explains the unified response that patient care is a central loyalty and something that, according to supervisor Nick, “you abide by without question.” Personal loyalties account for the final dimension of loyalty in the workplace, and it too does not involve reciprocation. Unlike the other forms of loyalty, personal loyalty is primarily an intrapersonal dimension. While self-
awareness and introspection are necessary in remaining loyal to oneself, it is not a matter of reciprocation, and cannot be understood as such.

Because of the complexity of loyalty in the workplace, as understood through its multiple dimensions, reciprocation plays an important role in how employees understand their workplace loyalties. Expectations of reciprocation with organizational loyalty focus on the successful completion of the employee-organization contract. Coworker loyalty relies on interpersonal loyalties like trust and honesty. Patient loyalty is exempt from reciprocation because the role of the employees is to protect and advocate for the patients, regardless of positive or negative reciprocation. The role of patient protection remained uncontested by the participants in this study. Personal loyalties also cannot be understood through reciprocation as they relate to intrapersonal values and convictions.

In attempting to define loyalty in the workplace in this radiology department, I have found that employees consistently understand their loyalties as diverse. Most employees described four dimensions of loyalty existing in their workplace experience: organizational loyalty, coworker loyalty, patient loyalty, and personal loyalty. However, participants tended to explain their loyalties in one of two ways: by conflating all of the loyalties into organizational loyalty, or by differentiating multiple facets of loyalty. When conflating the types of loyalty, employees described all of their loyalty relationships as positive, which allowed them to assert that coworker loyalty and patient loyalty were necessarily one with organizational loyalty. Conversely, participants who differentiated the types of loyalty often held a low level of loyalty in one area while holding a high level of loyalty in another area, or they found one or more type of loyalty
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less important than others. Because loyalty is so often aligned with reciprocation, I further examined the expectations of reciprocation participants aligned with different types of loyalty.

The understanding of these employees' perceptions of loyalty becomes important as I seek to explain organizational dissent through the lens of loyalty. Using the dimensions and descriptions of loyalty developed in this section, I analyze and interpret the participants' narratives of dissent experiences.

Dissent Stories: Leaders, Whiners, Heroes, and Me

Having examined the loyalties employees experience in the context of the radiology department, I now explore the descriptions and narratives of the dissent experience using the lens of loyalty. As stories about dissent emerge and are recirculated in the organization, they build and shape the perceptions of dissent, including the depiction of appropriate and inappropriate motivations for dissent. In this section, I use the previously-defined dimensions of loyalty to understand the motivations and perceptions of dissent. I also compare the different motivations participants describe in the actions of leaders, of other workers, and of themselves. Although employees rarely drew direct connections between loyalty and dissent, their narratives clearly illustrate how motivations and perceptions of dissent are built on a foundation of loyalties.

To begin, I examine the perceptions of leaders who shape the organizational culture of the department, including the upper management's attitude toward dissent. Then, I look at the participants' perceptions of others in the workplace, described as whiners and heroes based on their motivations. Finally, I explore the participants'
descriptions of their own actions as they choose to dissent or remain silent in the workplace. When understood through the lens of loyalty, the differences and similarities in the employees' perceptions of leaders, others, and themselves draw attention to the complexity of workplace dissent.

**Leaders: Shaping a Culture of Dissent**

As described in Chapter 2, the actions of leaders do much to shape an organization's cultural perception of dissent. In this organization, the formal leadership consists of the director of radiology, two managers, and eight supervisors. However, within each modality, technologists with high levels of seniority sometimes take on informal leadership roles as well. Participants' narratives described employees' perceptions of their direct supervisors (micro level) as well as their managers and director (macro level), both in the past and present. The employees' described the cultural connotations of dissent in the department, setting the stage for the dissent story. I begin by describing the upper management's approach to dissent in the past and present. In addition, I describe the employees' perceptions of their direct supervisors' expectations and actions regarding dissent.

In Chapter 3, I mentioned a major leadership change in the radiology department, occurring approximately two years before data collection began. In that change, the former director, Fred, resigned on ethical grounds, and was replaced by current director Christine. Christine has a long tenure, and was part of the organization under the leadership of Fred. Under the previous leadership, employees described feeling very limited in their freedom to express disagreement. Participants indicated that dissent was
“ignored” and not welcomed, and that their suggestions or problems were often met with the mantra that “we’ve just always done it this way.” Supervisor Laura said she felt “there wasn’t a lot of trust amongst the groups [modalities]. There was a lot of being paranoid, thinking there’s ulterior motives.” As Laura and other employees described the lack of trust, they also highlighted the desire for transparency, which was avoided by leaders unwilling to listen to dissenting voices or work through disagreeing opinions.

Because the previous leaders rejected dissent and reinforced compliance with a rigid structure, the previous leaders seemed to affirm a mimetic condition, as described by Hegstrom (1990). As the environment continuously silenced dissent, the overall morale of the department dropped. According to technologist Rachel most dissent took the form of grousing with coworkers: “The department as a whole over the course of many years became just—people just talked amongst themselves, instead of going to the manager because they knew nothing would be done. So, then the rapport among employees definitely went down. Everyone was bitter, no one bothered, because it wouldn’t help.” As a result of the lack of transparency and the silencing of dissent, views that might have taken the form of fruitful articulated dissent by “going to managers” was replaced by the underground latent dissent of “talk[ing] amongst themselves.” Because there was little hope for positive change and the power of voice was withdrawn, it follows that employee morale would decrease and employees would become somewhat apathetic and cynical.
The negative consequences were not only felt by staff technologists, but also by other leaders. Then-manager (now director) Christine said she felt as silenced and limited as front-line staff members. She explained:

There was such a difficult line, and you had to choose your battles. With an effect change where you really felt that you had to make your stance, there were so many ways I felt handcuffed by that situation ... Sometimes there were just areas that I couldn’t even tackle, even in my own role. You just can’t touch those things. And you know they’re wrong. You know you’re wrong, and you’re going okay, how do ... It was probably the most challenging working situation that I’d ever been in.

Even in a higher leadership role, Christine described her difficulty in voicing dissent. Because the culture rejected dissent so strongly, she described having to “choose [her] battles.” This constraint further frustrated Christine, particularly in the areas “you just can’t touch” even though she knew they were “wrong.” Christine’s frustration with the situation appears to be complicated by her leadership position. When she said, “You know they’re wrong. You know you’re wrong,” she articulated a realization that as a leader she felt she unwillingly participated in a silencing, mimetic culture. This environment illustrates the danger of a culture that sees dissent as solely negative and rejects all instances of and efforts toward dissent.

Under previous leadership, dissent was aligned only with disloyalty to the organization, without the possibility of serving a healthy or fruitful purpose in the organization. Because the umbrella dimension of loyalty, organizational loyalty, was compromised by dissent in this culture, choosing to dissent could result in punitive consequences. In short, because organizational loyalty was disassociated from dissent, in
order to protect their positions and jobs (the personal dimension of loyalty), employees generally chose silence.

However, the change in leadership occurred after, as Christine said, “someone [an employee] finally came forward” to describe unethical actions taken by the former director. Although no participants, including Christine, would or could share details of the unethical actions, it is more than likely that the actions potentially compromised patient care. Because patient loyalty is uncontested, that dimension of loyalty became stronger than organizational loyalty and even the employee’s personal loyalties, leading that employee to voice dissent. The employee who voiced concerns had voluntarily left the organization between the dissenting action and the time of data collection, which draws attention to the way in which concerns about patient care became more important than personal advancement or retention of employment in that hospital system. Other organization members clearly shared the balance of concerns voiced by this employee, as the concerns led to the director’s resignation. According to Christine, serious ethical concerns made the decision to change leadership less contested, because “once you cross the ethics piece in a medical center, no one will stand behind you.” This scenario presents an excellent example of conflicting loyalties in a dissent situation. When the employee’s concerns reached a certain severity, motivated by patient loyalty, that person set aside organizational and personal loyalty in the choice to speak up.

When the previous director resigned, Christine was promoted to the director of radiology position. After working in what she described as a difficult work situation, Christine said she began the process of rebuilding the department. She described her
vision for organizational culture as countering the previous approach to dissent. In her words:

The whole vision, and one of the things I’ve talked to the associates about and that we’ve trained the associates in, is really giving them their voice. Allowing them the freedom to challenge in a professional manner, taught them how to do that in a professional manner, and provide a forum where it’s ok and it’s healthy. [We can] become a more learning environment rather than a punitive, or you’re-going-to-get-into-trouble or you’re-going-to-get-fired, environment.

A healthy organizational culture, according to Christine, involves empowering employees through “giving them their voice” and “freedom to challenge.” In short, her vision requires opening the door to articulated dissent. According to supervisor Laura, that cultural shift has not gone unnoticed. Laura said she sees a change in openness, and that leaders are now “forthcoming” and “lay their cards on the table, so that you always know what’s going on.” Technologist Angela agreed that “everybody in the department has a voice. You’re allowed to have a voice!” Angela’s tone of surprise in describing the invitation to speak up illustrated that this cultural shift was still a new idea, but one greeted with positivity. Just as the lack of transparency decreased employee morale, according to technologist Rachel, the cultural openness has seen positive returns. She stated:

They [present leaders] definitely want open lines of communication, lots of changes have happened. The idea that “it is what it is because it’s always been that way,” well, that’s out the door. We are changing daily. And you know what? Everyone seems like they are more positive, better moods, the professionalism, and how serious people take their jobs has gone way up.

Although change is often associated with difficult workplace situations, in this case, Rachel seemed to describe change as healthy and beneficial, perhaps because it is accompanied by “open lines of communication” and positive shifts in organizational
culture. In addition, the mantra that employees described as “squashing” dissent (“it’s always been that way”) had been replaced with an environment of communal investment. With an emphasis on learning and improvement through employee voice, the new organizational culture aligns dissent with positive development and growth, making it an act of organizational loyalty as well as an act of coworker and patient loyalty.

Even with the change in culture at the highest level, everyday experiences with direct supervisors shape employees’ experience of and attitude toward dissent at work. Unlike voicing concerns with peers, dissenting to a supervisor carries with it an expectation for action. Jamie, who recently transitioned from a non-management work role to a supervisor role, said he sees a difference in how coworkers approach him with disagreements, saying, “Instead of just listening to issues, they expect you to listen and act on those issues.” Before taking a leadership position, Jamie said he heard many more complaints about policies or other workers. Now, however, “They don’t necessarily complain to me about that anymore. They know I still know about it, yet they don’t expect me to do anything about it.” According to Jamie, employees see articulated dissent expressed to supervisors as serving a different function than latent dissent, or grousing among coworkers. The primary function of articulated dissent is to change the existing condition, while venting generally serves a cathartic function. Therefore, when choosing whether to practice upward articulated dissent, the employees consider whether the resulting action they hope to achieve is worth the effort of speaking up to the boss.

Because of the increased investment and expectations associated with voicing dissent to supervisors, employees said they are frustrated when supervisors fail to
respond to their concerns. Technologist Rachel, who has worked at Hospital X for 23 years, said she has seen a variety of supervisor responses to voiced concerns. She explained:

I would say some of them [supervisors] listen, and you’re pretty confident nothing will happen. They’ll listen to ya, because they know that they are supposed to. There are others that definitely follow up. And I don’t expect, like, if I think such and such should happen, and if they come back and say, “Well, I did follow up, and this is what I plan on doing. It’s not what you wanted . . .” and I’m okay with that, as long as they follow up and get back to you. I mean, I think that makes an employee feel important. We definitely have one [supervisor] who acts upon things, but doesn’t really follow up with you. Like, you hear about it, like something was actually done about it, but they never actually told you, which I think is odd, because you’re the one who brought it up.

Rachel’s description of supervisor responses to dissent illustrated the standing expectation that leaders will take some action after an employee voices concerns. In some cases, Rachel said she was “pretty confident nothing would happen,” or no action would be taken. She compares this to some supervisors who do take action, even if that action is simply a verbal follow up with the employee. The action of providing feedback is sufficient, in some cases, to meet the employees’ expectation of their boss’s role, because it honors the employees’ concern and “makes an employee feel important.”

In several descriptions of leaders’ failure to act after hearing dissent, participants mentioned their belief that their bosses did not want to work through disagreement. In her one year as a technologist, Carrie said she has noticed some leaders’ resistance to handling dissent or conflict. She said:

I don’t think that they [leaders] are comfortable confronting people or dealing with issues that need to be dealt with. I know they’ll put it off. Um, I’ve seen it happen several times where something needs to happen and they just find a million other things to do rather than handle the situation at hand. And it just always gets worse before it gets better, when no one says anything.
Carrie related the lack of action by supervisors to increased problems in the department, and increased feelings that nothing can change when no action is taken for long periods of time. She also illustrated the awareness she and other technologists have of both the problems and the lack of resolution.

Perhaps one of the clearest problems participants expressed when discussing their boss' reactions to dissent was not only a lack of action, but a lack of interest. Just as Rachel described supervisors listening "because they know they are supposed to," several participants described the empty listening they felt they received from supervisors. Mike, a technologist at Hospital X for seven years, said:

"Nowadays, when I tell my boss, I just feel like it goes on deaf ears. I mean, they'll either say it's bitching just to bitch, or—I'm not saying they don't care, they may have their own stressors. When I've gone to my boss, and it's very rare that I would go to him, but the times that I have, it's just gone in one ear and out the other. You know, that's just my opinion from the top all the way down. And that's fine. I don't care. Very, very rarely do I speak up. And the one or two times that I have in these seven years, nobody cares."

Clearly, Mike's belief that this boss doesn't care about his concerns has shaped his own investment in speaking up. He believed his boss generally discredited his concerns as unhelpful "bitching" that does not deserve attention. As a result of those experiences, Mike has become apathetic and somewhat cynical about the level of concern leaders "from the top all the way down" have for the dissent of their employees.

Conversely, some employees described feeling that they had "great" relationships with their bosses, where they felt comfortable voicing concerns to him or her and "keeping them in the loop." In those cases, the employees felt their concerns were recognized, considered, and responded to. In addition, some supervisors acknowledge
that they do not respond to expressed concerns as immediately as they should because they simply “don’t like conflict.” Other supervisors, however, indicated an eagerness to take action based on employees’ opinions, like six-year supervisor Nick, who said, “If you’ve got a complaint, come to me, let’s fix it and make people happy.”

An organization’s leadership does much to shape the cultural understanding of dissent in the workplace. In the radiology department, the former director cultivated a culture of little transparency where dissent was not welcomed and was viewed as disloyal to the organization. The current director, Christine, has attempted to shift the cultural paradigm to an environment wherein employees feel empowered to voice disagreements and opinions in a way that is fruitful for the organization, as a form of organizational loyalty. Several employees said they recognized this change in the leadership approach and appreciated the openness and freedom it afforded them. However, that cultural shift began on the highest level of leadership. In the everyday experience of most technologists and support staff members, the true cultural understanding of dissent emerges from the daily experiences they have with their direct supervisors. Employees indicated that if they voice disagreements to their boss, they expected their supervisors to listen and respond. Several participants indicated that their bosses do not respond appropriately to their concerns, either because of hesitance to be involved in conflict, or because they do not consider the concerns important. As such, the macro level actions of the organization’s leaders set standards for the perceptions of dissent. However, the micro level interactions of employees with their direct supervisors are equally influential in shaping employees’ perceptions of the organizational culture toward dissent. The
differences between macro and micro level attitudes in this organization highlight the complexity of the organizational culture toward dissent.

Whiners and Heroes: Perceptions of Others’ Dissent

The leaders’ view of organizational culture in a workplace, and specifically the risk associated with speaking up, is very important in shaping the perceptions of dissent. However, the way in which employees choose to speak up is just as important in understanding dissent in this department. Participants in this study indicated that they held both positive and negative perceptions of dissenter, depending on the motives of the dissenter. In their narratives, participants grouped dissenter into two general categories, those they viewed negatively (whiners) and those they viewed positively (heroes).

Most frequently, participants’ perceptions of others voicing concerns were negative. Surprisingly, there was little difference in whether the employees were using articulated dissent (addressing a superior) or latent dissent (grousing among coworkers), in how the dissent was perceived. Most of the participants indicated that most of the time, their coworkers were not actually seeking any sort of positive change, but were simply spreading their own displeasure to others. Participants used words like “whining,” “complaining,” “bitching,” “pissing,” and “moaning” to illustrate their negative perceptions of this type of dissenter.

Supervisor Jamie viewed complaining employees negatively because “to me complaining is where I don’t expect anything to be done about it. I’m complaining just because I’m whining and I’m in a bad mood.” From the participants’ perspective, whining employees are not trying to improve the workplace through their dissent;
instead, they are examples of "those people where nothing is right" who complain simply because "life is not fair." The judgment of these employees can be severe, like supervisor Norm's assertion that "If people aren't really happy, and yet they don't really want to leave, then they'd rather piss and moan and take a survey and say, 'Oh, I'm not happy, I'm not happy, but I'm not willing to do anything about it.'" Norm clearly expressed frustration with the type of employee who, in his view, does not seem motivated to take steps toward change, but who consistently expresses displeasure with the work experience.

When describing the whiners, participants generally attribute the speaker's motivations to his or her personality, something they describe as a fixed "way that they are." Technologist Rachel suggested that some employees seek attention, while supervisor Norm said he believed it is a form of disengagement in the workplace. In contrast, supervisor Nick said that sometimes employees see complaining as a form of self-benefit which he "takes with a grain of salt." In this way, employees drew attention to the fact that not all dissent is fruitful, and that most employees are well aware of, and annoyed by, dissent without a goal of improvement.

Interestingly, employees also held negative perceptions of others who do not speak up at work. Several participants provided examples of situations wherein they believe that dissent was called for, but employees remained silent. These employees were viewed as "too passive" or even "spineless," because they did not voice legitimate concerns to the boss. Technologist Carrie explained her belief that employees often hesitate to go to the boss with their concerns. She explained one scenario:
In this situation, it was one of the techs talking to a patient on the phone, being very rude. And she represents our organization, and somebody overheard her interaction and told me. And, you know, they complain about it to me, and I told them, “You need to talk to my supervisor.” Confronting that person won’t do any good, because they know about it, they are aware that they are rude and don’t change it. [They] need to confront my manager and they never do. So, they are not willing to speak up. I think they just don’t want to start anything. Nobody wants to really get that person in trouble, but at the same time, everyone just lets that behavior slide because of that.

This narrative is particularly interesting because it describes an instance of latent dissent, wherein one employee voices concerns to another peer-level employee. However, Carrie’s primary concern in sharing this example was that no articulated dissent took place; no one told the supervisor about the problem. When viewed as an articulated dissent scenario, silence won, as neither the employee who overheard the conversation nor Carrie mentioned the problem to the boss. Although the employee in this narrative felt loyalty to the patient (who received a rude phone call) and the organization (that was being represented), the fear of “starting something” or “step[ping] on anyone’s toes” by initiating an interpersonal conflict outweighed the other loyalties. Carrie viewed the employee who overheard the call as the responsible party in voicing articulated dissent to the supervisor, because Carrie did not want to “get in the middle” of the problem because she did not hear the call first-hand. Clearly, Carrie did not see herself as responsible for voicing upward dissent, but she remains a participant in a latent dissent story that perpetuated silence rather than voicing articulated dissent to improve patient service and quality of care because of the fear of coworker disloyalty.

While most often silence was viewed as a lack of confidence or even a “lie of omission,” one participant acknowledged that employees’ choices to grouse using latent
dissent (sometimes referred to as "whining" by participants) rather than voice articulated dissent to the boss might be rooted in the threat of negative repercussions. Support staff member Kim said that she and a few other members of her work group often feel as though they are treated unfairly in the distribution of hours and schedules. While Kim said she speaks up, the others remain silent. She explained:

Kim: I know within my peer group, we all have pretty much the same complaints. We'll talk about it within each other. But then when the supervisor comes in, they don't speak up. And I'll say, "Why didn't you say anything?" And they are worried that it might affect them on their peer eval as far as raises and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Do you think it would?


Although Kim described her coworkers as "just too passive" to speak up later in her interview, here she suggested that their hesitance might be well-founded. The employees want to work a schedule that they feel is fair, but they would rather ensure positive evaluations and raises, and so they choose not to speak up for fear of losing out on workplace benefits. In this case, two facets of the employees' personal loyalties are weighing in favor of silence.

Just as whining, complaining, and even silence can be perceived as negative forms of dissent, some participants described instances where coworkers spoke up in ways that were positive and appropriate: the heroes of the dissent stories. While participants viewed negative dissenters as not interested in positive change in the workplace, the heroes were credited with selfless motivations that benefited the workplace. Supervisor Norm called these people "the brazen and the boldest, and the
ones that really believe they have a stand and really have an opinion.” Norm further explained that, in his view, these employees are usually “in the right” based on the opinion they express.

Participants said that being in the right often meant prioritizing patient care or departmental improvement over personal benefit. As supervisor Nick said, “If you’ve got somebody who is just so good, patient care is why they are here, there is going to be a lot of respect for that person.” A high level of patient loyalty is one characteristic that employees respect in others, and it often forms a positive perception of that person’s motivations in dissenting. Technologist Abby, who is new to her department with a tenure of two years, said she respects the experience of her coworkers, and trusts their dissenting opinions. She said her coworkers with high seniority “have the right to voice what bothers them. And their opinions are usually—from what I’ve witnessed—they are usually right.” High levels of seniority represent traditional organizational loyalty, perhaps explaining why employees of long tenure tend to be regarded as loyal in a general sense. Their long-term dedication to the workplace leads others to see their dissent as appropriate, helpful, and “right.” These data suggest that employees’ perceptions of others’ dissent are influenced by who is dissenting. As employees form perceptions of other employees’ dissent based on its motivating loyalties, they also form perceptions of the employees more generally as people. Those general perceptions, in turn, shape the way in which the subsequent dissent episodes will be perceived. Thus, the perceptions of the dissent and perception of the dissenter are deeply linked, primarily because of the perceived motivating loyalties.
However, seniority was not always associated with positive actions of dissent. Supervisor Nick explained an instance where a positive change initiated by technologists was halted by other staff members. He said:

There was a group of people that got together and kind of pushed for a change in hours and the way coverage was provided throughout the shifts. This core group, they probably were on the right page. They succeeded; the change was made in the way hours of coverage were administered through the department. They had it in place, upper management approved it, and probably a month after that, it reverted back to the way it was. So, it didn’t succeed. And basically, that was all put in motion by two to three technologists who had seniority. They didn’t approve of it, simply because this other group liked it . . . It’s without question now, next time there won’t be near the drive [to make changes].

In Nick’s telling of this dissent story, he cast the group of employees hoping to make a change as the heroes. He believed they were “on the right page,” and they used the available channels to make a positive impact on their department, demonstrating loyalty to both the organization and their coworkers. However, because a small group of others with high levels of seniority “threw their weight around,” the change was overturned. In this case, Nick described the silencing voice as coming from peers, rather than from management. He also openly acknowledged that this failed attempt at voicing concerns to bring about positive change has led to decreased engagement and investment in the workplace. Nick believed that future efforts at “try[ing] to make a change for the betterment of the group” would probably not happen. He said, “I have heard comments since this happened like, ‘What’s the point?’ or ‘It’s not going to change anything anyway.’ Not good.” As he described this dissent story, Nick illustrated the possibility that the perceived heroes of one dissent story might be perceived as the unengaged or disinterested whiners in the next story.
In the descriptions of other people's dissenting actions in the workplace, participants described their peers as showing both negative and positive qualities. Negative dissenters were described as whiners who have little interest in improving the workplace or taking action toward its development. Other peers were perceived as weak if they choose not to speak up, even though they may have legitimate concerns about doing so, such as interpersonal conflict or poor evaluations. Conversely, some employees' dissenting actions were viewed as positive, when they were motivated by loyalties such as patient care or organizational betterment. In short, the presumed loyalties of the dissent did much to change how others perceived them in the workplace. More often than not, dissenters were viewed as complainers and whiners, and the depth and complexity of other employees' loyalties were seldom considered. The examination of leadership attitudes toward dissent and perceptions of others' dissent present important perspectives of the communication around workplace dissent. However, this study is incomplete without a thorough exploration of employees' views of their own actions of dissent.

Me: Autobiographical Explanations of Dissent

In their descriptions of their choices to dissent or remain silent, employees generally identified themselves as either someone who will always speak up, or as someone who will speak up only when necessary (and sometimes not even then). Whatever action the employees took, they provided clear explanations of their motivations, which offer insights into the relationship between loyalties and dissent. In fact, participants clearly mentioned all four dimensions of loyalty in their narratives. The
employees viewed their choices as being motivated by appropriate organizational, coworker, patient, and personal loyalties.

Given the uncontested nature of patient loyalty, it is not surprising that employees were very absolute in their affirmation that they would speak up if patient care were at risk. New technologists like Abby, who has tenure of two years, said she would defer to those with more experience rather than speaking up. However, she said, “If something hindered patient care, like if somebody did something directly to a patient, then I would [speak up].” Even with Abby’s relatively low status and her low overall likelihood of voicing dissent, she claimed she would speak up if patients were at risk and that she “feel[s] supported” in doing so.

Supervisor Norm provided a more complex example of balancing patient loyalty. It is the role of technologists in the radiology department to complete studies or tests which are read and diagnosed by physicians. It is not the role of the technologists to diagnose patients. However, Norm described a time when he voiced dissent to a physician based on a diagnosis. Norm said:

The staff [technologist] will come and say, “Jeez, Norm, I think the doctor misread this.” And so, then we’ll look at it. And it’s like, wow! And so, patient care! I take it, and I read it, and I go to the doctor, and I say, “You know, we did this study, and this isn’t the outcome that we thought. Can you sit down with it and go over it with me. Do you mind?” “Oh no, I don’t mind.” And sometimes I win, sometimes I lose, but at least my thought is, I made them spend a little extra time reviewing it. And that’s all I can do, because I’m not a doctor.

In this case, the technologist reported to Norm his/her concern that the physician had misread the study. Because Norm agreed that the diagnosis was wrong, he voiced his concern to the doctor, because patient care was at risk. Norm perceived the risk of
misdiagnosis as greater than the risk of interpersonal or organizational conflict that might result from questioning a physician. Interestingly, Norm considered the outcome of the dissent as "winning" (the doctor overturning the previous diagnosis) or "losing" (the doctor upholding the diagnosis). This choice of words indicates that Norm considered the situation a personal victory or loss, suggesting that he also saw the action as motivated by his own professional reputation, a facet of personal loyalty. Regardless of the outcome, however, Norm describes the action as a benefit to patient care because "I made them spend a little extra time reviewing it."

Perhaps the most interesting relationship between loyalty and dissent from the autobiographical dissent stories is coworker loyalty. Most employees perceived the threat of alienating, or promoting conflict between, coworkers as a major obstacle to voicing concerns. Although the department is rather large, most employees work in small modalities of five to fifteen people, and so voicing concerns about work process or coworker behavior becomes a sensitive matter. As technologist Abby said, "We spend a lot of time in this department with these six girls, more time than we spend with our families," so it is best to get along. More often than not, participants agreed that this may lead to letting problems and disagreements slide without voicing concerns because of "what it would cause other people to feel about me" until an issue is, in Norm's words, a "big-ass, something's broke and you're like, oh shit, I gotta fix it" situation.

However, as technologist Carrie mentioned, "Things usually get worse before they get better." The power of coworker relationships to "sweep stuff under the rug" was one of the strongest reasons employees gave for not speaking up. Perhaps because, as
Abby indicated, the participants spend so much time with each other, they do not want to disrupt their relationships with coworkers by using articulated upward dissent unless it is absolutely necessary for patient protection or organizational improvement. In addition, nearly all of the participants described their coworkers as friends, which the participants related to a decreased likelihood of reporting poor customer service or other less severe issues because “I don’t want to get my friend in trouble.” Therefore, the coworker loyalty was generally considered more important than personal loyalties or larger organizational loyalties in employees’ descriptions of their motivations for voicing disagreements.

While coworker loyalty was often related to not speaking up, a number of participants related organizational loyalty to voicing concerns. Technologist Rachel recognized the fruitful function of dissent as something in which she was obliged to participate. She explained:

Definitely if things aren’t right, and I know it’s not, I will speak up. Because, I think if you just sit back and never bother, things will never get better. And I don’t speak up just to benefit myself, but to help the whole department. I think maybe early, early on when I was the new guy [sic], maybe I wouldn’t have, because I didn’t want to overstep my bounds, but once you become one of the long-term employees or lead technologists, then you feel like—I feel like it’s my obligation to do that.

Rachel clearly viewed dissent as a vehicle for positive change, on the personal level and on the organizational level. She also drew attention to her role as a senior technologist, and connected her 23-year tenure with her investment in seeing the department improve. Rachel also indicated that she feels her dissent is welcomed, at least in part because of her positive relationship with her boss, which she admitted “is not always the case.”
An important minority in the study were the employees who indicated that they have dissented or would dissent even if it is unwelcome. Under the previous director, supervisor Norm admitted that he often dissented rather aggressively. He said, "I had a lot of issues with him [former director] and that was very verbal in some of these meetings. I'd challenge him, and I would argue or disagree with the way that he was trying to lead the group down a certain path. I did not agree with it at all. And it would get vocal, and other people would be like 'Oh my goodness!'" Although Norm was openly voicing upward dissent in a hostile environment, he continued to voice his opinion in a way that was "very verbal" and "vocal." To some extent, Norm was probably protected by his leadership status; however, he did face personal risk by continuously disagreeing with the most powerful leader. He clearly identified his organizational loyalty as a major factor in his dissent, when he said he believed the director was "leading the group down a certain path," which Norm deemed the wrong path. Although in the overall culture, dissent was viewed as a disloyal and unwelcome action, Norm's belief that he was in the right and had the best interests of the organization in mind motivated him to accept the risks associated with dissenting.

In other cases, however, the threat of being perceived as disloyal to the organization suppressed employees' voices. Just as Kim's coworkers did not speak up because they feared negative evaluations, 16-year technologist Sheri said, "Bottom line is sometimes keep your mouth shut and just get on with it, that's the best way. I know I can—I speak up and I get into trouble [with the boss]." Although Sheri never felt like her wage or hours were affected, she said she did feel like she was treated unfairly and less
favorably in interpersonal interactions after she voiced disagreement. Sheri’s choice to "keep [her] mouth shut" was primarily motivated by her desire to maintain a positive interpersonal relationship with her boss and not appear disloyal to the organization.

Much like loyalty to the organization, personal loyalties both motivated dissent and discouraged it, according to participants’ narratives. Most employees agreed that although they weigh a variety of factors such as organizational loyalty and coworker loyalty, their ultimate decision to speak up is shaped by "how strongly I feel about something." The participants’ rights as workers and values as human beings tended to form the basis of how the employees determined the severity of their grievance and whether or not they would speak up. Technologist Rachel said, "If it’s something I believe in and know I’m right, then I never really hesitate to speak up, because...I know that I’m right!" For Rachel, her high level of investment in the issue decreased her perceived risk of dissenting.

For others, the belief that they are right does not decrease the risk of speaking up or increase the possibility of a positive response. Support staff member Kim said she continuously questions the work schedule because she considers it unfair. She said, "I stick up for myself. I keep doing it." She saw her actions as defending herself, and even though her dissent hasn’t changed the schedule, she said she continues to voice her disagreement because “it’s really important to me.” In contrast, technologist Sheri explained her view: “I will speak up if I have to. I won’t keep quiet. But certain things, if I know I’m not going to go anywhere with it, why waste my energy?” Whereas Kim’s personal loyalties motivated her to continued dissent, Sheri’s narrative indicated that she
saw little hope for change, which lowers her level of investment and her likelihood of continuing to dissent.

In addition to not wanting to waste their energy, some employees expressed concerns about drawing too much attention to themselves through the act of articulated dissenting. Supervisor Nick explained that "you hate to get on the radar too much with too many issues, too much turmoil. Because then it's like, what's going on in that little department that they can't resolve issues?" Nick's concern that dissent will draw negative attention and turmoil to his modality area made him less likely to express dissent. In addition, because Nick is a leader, his concern affects the way he goes about resolving dissent in his work group so that it does not draw attention to his modality area. All of these efforts are focused on protecting his modality area from criticism and by extension protecting his leadership position. Although by protecting his modality area Nick demonstrated organizational loyalty, he was also concerned about others' perceptions of him as an employee and leader based on the amount of dissent taking place in his area. This example clearly highlights the role of personal loyalty as Nick considered the implications of dissent. Thus, while personal loyalties often inspire employees to come forward with their concerns, the personal threats that might accompany dissent can also discourage speaking up. In this way, personal loyalties illustrate a complex system of motivations as employees make decisions about dissent in the workplace.

In sum, dissent is shaped by the broader organizational culture, as informed by leadership on the macro and micro levels. The current macro approach to dissent as a
welcome mechanism for change allows many employees to feel free to express their opinions. However, micro experiences with direct bosses can leave employees feeling less comfortable in voicing their concerns. When reflecting on other employees’ dissent, participants saw speaking up as negative whining, spineless silence, or heroic dissent. The difference was based on how invested the employee seemed in positive organizational improvement or patient care. The motivations for others’ dissent was seen as simply and clearly motivated by the employee’s fixed personality. In contrast, the employees’ own experiences of dissent were explained in terms of the complex pressures they feel and balance, which are represented by the four dimensions of loyalty.

Perceptions of the Relationship between Loyalty and Dissent: Beneficial, Antagonistic, and Complex

Thus far, the data from this research have shown that employees recognize a variety of loyalties in the workplace, and that the experience of workplace dissent—both perceptions of others and perceptions of oneself—can be seen through the lens of motivating loyalties. It is also important to explore how participants view the relationship between dissent and loyalty. When describing their views of others’ or their own dissent, employees rarely spoke specifically about the loyalties they recognized in the workplace experience. However, when asked to directly describe how loyalty relates to dissent, participants represented the loyalty-dissent relationship as beneficial, antagonistic, or complex. Interestingly, when employees articulated their views on the loyalty or disloyalty of speaking up, they called upon the four dimensions of loyalty to explain their positions.
A Beneficial Relationship between Loyalty and Dissent

Several participants said that they viewed the relationship between dissent and loyalty as a beneficial and natural one. Technologist Rachel explained that she sees dissent as an important service to her organization. She said, “If you want to keep things good at Hospital X because you are loyal to Hospital X, then you have to be willing to go out on a limb. A lot of people are like, ‘I don’t want to rock the boat.’ Well, yes, but it’s really important if this is going to be a great place to work.” Rachel recognized the value her dissenting voice could have for her organization, and so she considered speaking up part of her loyalty to the organization. Rachel also noted that she feels an increased level of loyalty because she is free to dissent, saying, “I’m not afraid to speak up because I think they are going to fire me if I do. As long as I’ve been here, I think the hospital values what I have to say.” This reciprocal loyalty is part of what made Rachel feel welcome to use her voice. The same is true for technologist Suzy, who believed the hospital’s respect for her as an employee has shaped her decisions to dissent. She explained, “I feel like Hospital X supported me in speaking up in a civil way, you know. I feel protected by that. When I speak up, I’m being loyal to my values.” Suzy saw her dissent as fueled by her personal loyalties (her values), and her dissent experience was positive because she was allowed to maintain her personal loyalty in the workplace.

Several employees pointed out the importance of dissent in allowing employees to maintain and cultivate their loyalties. However, that cultivation is only possible in an organizational culture open to dissent. Manager Janet suggested that the beneficial
relationship between dissent and loyalty depends on the organizational response to dissent. She said:

To be completely loyal, you have to feel as though if you dissent or if you have concerns, they are, for the most part, listened to and either acted upon or somehow enacted. Because if you were constantly put down on anything that you dissented about or anything that you brought up, you know, pretty soon you would say, um, “Let’s bag this place, because they don’t care about what I feel.”

Janet highlighted the importance of dissent being honored in order for loyalty and dissent to exist in a positive relationship. She illustrated how employees’ concerns must be matched by the organization’s response to the dissent through actions that demonstrate the organization’s loyalty to continuous improvement. Insofar as dissent offers the opportunity for both the individual and the organization to show their loyalty, the relationship between the two ideas is a beneficial and reciprocal one.

When employees described a beneficial relationship between loyalty and dissent, they usually explained the way in which dissenting can offer an opportunity for organizational improvement, connecting dissent to the organizational dimension of loyalty. In addition, participants proposed that the organization’s positive response to dissent indicated a high level of loyalty toward the employees. Therefore, the beneficial relationship between loyalty and dissent focuses mainly on organizational loyalty and the reciprocation of loyalty from the organization. From this perceptive, dissent was viewed as an action that demonstrated mutual respect and mutual investment between the employee in the organization.
An Antagonistic Relationship between Loyalty and Dissent

While some participants suggested that the act of dissenting offers an opportunity for employees and employers to express their loyalty, others did not see a beneficial connection between the two. For some employees, it was as simple as suggesting that negativity is, by nature, disloyal. Support staff member Mary Anne explained, "If you have an issue against who you work for, you can pretty much plot and try to set somebody up to fail. I mean if you have negativity, then obviously you're not loyal." From Mary Anne’s perspective, she saw little opportunity for fruitful dissent, because dissent is considered always and only negative. Mary Anne then seemed to suggest that all negativity is disloyal, and often results in "plotting." Like Mary Anne, several employees articulated the belief that disagreeing and negativity are one and the same. In that view, it is hard to embrace the notion that dissent (voicing disagreement) can demonstrate loyalty by taking the form of fruitfulness and improvement.

In other situations, employees highlighted the way in which long-term or continuous dissent illustrated disloyalty. Supervisor Laura works at Hospital Z, the rural acute care facility. As described in Chapter 3, several staff members of Hospital Z, primarily led by one surgical physician, loudly voiced dissent with the larger health organization’s choices in services provided at and equipment allocated to the smaller facility. The larger organization offered to sell the hospital to the community, but the city was unable to purchase the hospital. Laura explained some staff members continued dissenting at the organization. She said:

They continue to work at the hospital and for the larger healthcare organization, and yet they are loyal to [the dissenting physician], and so they have been kind of
outspoken about saying negative things about the healthcare organization and, um, just being kind of unloyal [sic], to use that word. And I did a lot of soul searching throughout the whole process, and said to myself, okay, if I choose to work here, then out of respect for the healthcare organization and for Hospital Z, then I have to be on board. And if I come in one day, and say, “I can’t do it,” maybe I don’t think what they are doing is right, then I think my role is to do the respectful thing and leave. But, because I choose to work there, I don’t want to bring that dissent into the workplace.

This narrative is particularly interesting because it highlights Laura’s view about the obligation of organizational loyalty in communication at work. Laura said she believed that the continued dissent was detrimental to the organization, and so it illustrated disloyalty to the organization. Because the staff members chose to continue working for the hospital, and perhaps because there was no longer much possibility of positive change, she does not see their actions as fruitful. In addition, Laura described her own “soul searching” and her choice to remain with Hospital Z, and she suggested that her choice demands that she not openly dissent about this situation. Interestingly, she stated that if her views changed, “the respectful thing” would be exiting the organization. Laura perhaps came to this conclusion because that was the choice of the dissenting physician; he left the hospital and began his own practice. Certainly, not all employees would agree with Laura’s view of this situation, but this context provides a very interesting example of the relationship between loyalty and dissent. For Laura, a serious consideration in workplace communication is organizational loyalty, which the dissenting staff members were not demonstrating. However, I speculate that they would defend their actions as loyalty to their patients and their community. Thus, from the perspective of one dimension of loyalty, this dissent is disloyal, while from others, it may demonstrate loyalty.
In other employees’ narratives, it was not perceived organizational disloyalty that opposed dissent, but coworker disloyalty. In the previous section, participants described how their relationships with coworkers often hold them back from speaking up when a peer is in the wrong. Technologist Angela said, “You may feel loyalty to this person that I work with, because they are my friend, and if they are doing something wrong, I’m not going to say anything to anyone. I’m not going to get my friend in trouble.” In this instance, coworker loyalty is at odds with the dissenting concerns, pitting loyalty against dissent. This tension can lead to the situation technologist Carrie described: “I think loyalty kind of covers up some things that need to be addressed. Because, you know, some of these people have worked together for forty years, and now they have an issue and they don’t want to do anything because it’s somebody they’ve worked with forever.”

The trend of long tenures and the good relationships between coworkers are positive characteristics that tend to yield high levels of coworker loyalty. However, in a situation where dissent needs to be voiced, because of other threats to the work process, patients, or the organization, the strength of coworker loyalty again serves as strong opposition to dissent.

A Complex Relationship between Loyalty and Dissent

Most frequently, participants’ discussions of the relationship between loyalty and dissent did not assert that the two concepts were friends or foes. Instead, most employees explained that the relationship is complicated. Specifically, employees said that the relationship between dissent and loyalty depended on the motivations of the dissenter and the perspective of the social actors in the workplace.
Technologist Kim said that, although her dissent is always driven by loyalties, her boss's perception of her loyalties complicate the act of dissenting. She said:

As far as patient care goes, I would always feel open about talking about it if I saw something that was not right or was questionable. And I also feel like with supervisors that I feel very welcomed to that. More than with other things. With other things, you go in and you can just see it [Kim rolls eyes to demonstrate supervisor's response]. But I don't think when it comes to patient care, no, they don't do that.

Here Kim described how the complexity of dissent is related to the perceived motive of the dissent. Because Kim and her supervisor would share a high level of patient loyalty, the supervisor would openly greet any concerns about patient care. On the other hand, although Kim's personal loyalties are very important to her, they are not important to her boss, and therefore the supervisor is less open to entertaining that type of dissent. Thus, it seems that, from her boss's perspective, Kim's dissent is considered loyal when regarding patients, but not when regarding her personal issues, while from her own perspective loyalty is always present in her choice to speak up.

In a more general sense, supervisor Joan summed up her perspective of the relationship between loyalty and dissent by saying, "I think that voicing disagreement is fine as long as it's a positive disagreement or a productive type of disagreement, that you know it's going to improve the things that are going on. I think that if you're just being a discontent, then you are not showing loyalty to your peers or to the system." Joan drew a very clear line between "being a discontent" and being "productive" in the action of dissent. The former she aligned with disloyalty both to the organization and to coworker relationships. However, the effort toward improvement was cast as beneficial to the system and to coworkers. Of course, that judgment is made according to Joan's view of
the dissenting behavior and what it represents. The fluidness of such views could lead to a situation like that described by Kim, where she is sometimes greeted with an attentive boss and sometimes with an eye roll.

It is not only perceived motivations that shape the relationship between loyalty and dissent, but the anticipated response of other social actors in the work setting. Technologist Abby proposed that the relationship between dissent and loyalty depends on the perspective from which it is seen. She explained:

"It would be loyal to your department if you were to speak up, but it might not be loyal to the person you are speaking up about. I mean, I guess in a sense, it is doing them a favor, because if you're the type of person that take constructive criticism and learns from it well, then it's good, but if you're the type of person who doesn't take constructive criticism well and just rebels and gets angry and sour about it, it's not going to do any good."

Again, coworker loyalties become an important dimension of the dissent/loyalty relationship. In Abby's description, dissenting about another coworker's behavior or treatment of a patient would demonstrate organizational loyalty, but not coworker loyalty. However, she immediately amends that idea when she says that dissent could be "doing them a favor" by offering them the opportunity to improve professionally. Of course, for some people that would not be the result of such an encounter, leading Abby back to the idea that dissent can be perceived as disloyal to coworkers, as a personal affront that may cause interpersonal tension.

Supervisor Norm related the dissent-loyalty relationship to the social actors' perspectives in a different way:

"My definition of loyalty in the workplace could be a little bit different than somebody else's definition of loyalty in the workplace. But yet, it could be that they believe they have loyalties in the workplace, but the parameters of those
loyalties might be set a little bit differently than my parameters. And that could cause us to have a little dissent.

In this piece of narrative, Norm explains perhaps the clearest reason that the relationship between dissent and loyalty is complex: loyalties depend on the person. Although some loyalties tend to be more widely held, the balance of loyalties and corresponding actions are perspective-based. Norm’s explanation described how conflict can emerge from the different perspectives people hold when they dissent.

In the previous section, participants described their experiences of dissent without direct connections to the concept of loyalty. Here, employees have described their views of the relationship between dissent and loyalty overtly. Some participants maintained the assumption that all disagreement is disloyal, while others asserted that dissent can and should always serve a positive function with a focus of improvement. Most employees indicated an awareness that loyalty can both motivate and deter dissent, based on the balance of loyalty-based concerns. Just as the nuanced explanation of dissenting experiences highlighted the matrix of considerations employees balance in the choice to speak up, their narratives here illustrate the tenuous relationship between dissent and loyalty. Furthermore, the articulation of the relationship between dissent and loyalty continue to shape the socially constructed understanding of the loyal and/or disloyal behavior of dissent. In short, the employees seemed to acknowledge that dissent can serve a helpful function, but that it always carries risks to specific dimensions of loyalty.

**Major Findings**

In sum, four major findings have emerged from this research. First, loyalty in the workplace consists of a variety of loyalties that can be broadly grouped into four
dimensions: organizational loyalty, coworker loyalty, patient loyalty, and personal loyalty. Although participants clearly described loyalties as multiple, some employees conflate the multiple loyalties into the single concept of being loyal to the organization. Others separated and differentiated workplace loyalties usually because they held different degrees of loyalty for different dimensions. Particularly when understood in a differentiated fashion, loyalties can conflict, leading to difficult choices in the workplace. Some loyalties—specifically to patients and coworkers—were considered more important and more highly valued than other forms of loyalty.

Second, the motivations for dissenting or remaining silent in the workplace can be understood as the process of balancing different loyalties that may “cross paths” in a workplace scenario. Because different types of loyalties are more or less contested in the workplace, other organization members’ dissent is viewed as loyal or disloyal according to the dissenter’s motivations. Others who were perceived as dissenting without a goal of change or improvement were considered disloyal whiners. Employees who were perceived as dissenting for self-benefit or who fail to speak up because of fear of negative consequences were also viewed negatively. Those speaking up with a goal of effecting positive change in work processes are often seen as loyal to the department or loyal to patients and are viewed as heroes. Perceptions of others’ motivations for dissent are usually assessed on an absolute scale of positive or negative actions without emphasis on the complexity or multiplicity of loyalties.

Third, in comparison, participants’ descriptions of their own dissent clearly emphasized their motivations in light of their complex systems of loyalties. Not
surprisingly, they tend to defend their own actions, by describing their motivations as appropriate. Although personal loyalty is typically not viewed as a noble form of workplace loyalty when practiced by others, several participants felt that their personal motivations were legitimate grounds for dissent and were not disloyal. Furthermore, employees’ choices to not dissent in a given situation were almost always associated with loyalty to their coworkers or others in the work environment. This finding suggests that, in some cases, coworker loyalty becomes the most significant obstacle to employee dissent, sometimes becoming more important than the threat of being disloyal to the organization at large.

Finally, although the typical cultural understandings of dissent tend to pit dissent and loyalty against each other, most participants recognized the possibility for dissent to serve as an act of loyalty in the workplace. However, the participants further described the complexity and risk involved in the choice to speak up, and how it often calls for an assessment of the dimensions of loyalty and how loyalties may be perceived.

Using these major findings, I discuss the implications of this work in Chapter 5. I begin by answering the research questions. Then, I describe the contributions of this work in conversation with existing literature through a series of theoretical implications. I also provide several practical implications, outline the limitations of the study, and list several directions for future research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

In this study, I explored the underlying motivations for workplace dissent by connecting dissent to the concept of loyalty. I researched a single site, a radiology department at a large healthcare organization, and collected one-on-one interviews from 17 organizational members with a variety of work roles and tenures. Using the data from the interviews, I analyzed and interpreted the results in the form of several major findings in response to the three research questions.

The first research question asked what motivates employees to dissent in a particular way. Using employees’ narratives describing their own choices in dissent situations, I found that loyalty plays an important role in if and how employees choose to dissent. While Hirschman’s (1970) and Farrell’s (1983) exit-voice-loyalty-neglect framework did acknowledge that loyalty was involved in workplace dissent situations, they argued that varying levels of loyalty are reflected in specific behaviors (e.g., low level of loyalty leads to neglect). I contend that loyalty must be understood pluralistically as multiple loyalties that employees constantly balance and enact through a variety of communication behaviors, including dissent. Within participant narratives, I identified four dimensions of loyalty that motivate the choice to dissent: organizational loyalty, coworker loyalty, patient loyalty, and personal loyalty. Because the dimensions of loyalty are fluid, rather than static, employees constantly balance their own feelings of loyalty along with others’ perceptions of loyalty. Without doubt, the balance of loyalties
is an important part of what Perlow (2003) calls “mental calculus,” or the equation employees continuously use to make decisions about speaking up at work (p. 26).

The four dimensions of loyalty also highlight the relationship between motivations and specific methods of dissenting (Kassing, 1997, 1998). For example, patient loyalty was much more likely to motivate upward articulated dissent, while personal loyalty is more likely to motivate latent dissent voiced to coworkers. Dissenting about coworker behavior was almost always perceived as a threat to coworker loyalty, making most employees less likely to dissent because of coworker loyalty considerations than any other loyalty concern. Although loyalties are incredibly complex and cannot guarantee a certain choice in dissent expression, this study provides a framework that not only addresses how dissent emerges, but explores why it emerges in certain ways. In Figure 1, the four dimensions of loyalty are arranged along a continuum describing the types of loyalty that are mostly likely and least likely to motivate upward articulated dissent, based on the participants’ descriptions in this study.

Figure 1: Types of Motivations and Employees’ Likelihood of Choosing to Dissent
Based on employees' descriptions of their workplace dissent, they are more likely to speak up because of concerns for patient safety or organizational concerns than they are to speak up about their personal concerns (e.g., hours, advancement) or coworker issues (e.g., coworker's poor performance, attitude). They are most likely to dissent because of patient loyalty, placing it on the far left end of the continuum in Figure 1. Employees are most likely to remain silent because of concerns with coworker loyalty, placing it on the far right end of the continuum. It is necessary to note that these concerns are more fluid than this image suggests, and dissent or silence may be motivated by a combination of loyalties. Figure 1 is intended to represent the trend of this data regarding the types of loyalties most and least likely to motivate dissent.

While the first research question explored the autobiographical descriptions of dissent, the second research question focused on how employees perceive other peoples' dissent. Whereas the first-person discussion of dissent uncovered a complex system of motivating loyalties, most employees see others' dissent as either loyal or disloyal based simply on the other individuals' personality. Participants rarely addressed others' motivations as complex or their choices to dissent as involving risks. Another employee's loyal dissent is seen as selflessly serving the organization; his or her disloyal dissent is seen as selfishly seeking personal gain at work. While employees' believed that any dimension of loyalty (organizational, coworker, patient, or personal) could qualify as a legitimate reason for their own dissent, personal loyalties were rarely considered an appropriate motivation for someone else to dissent. This finding is consistent with the social perception of dissent as potentially helpful (my dissent) and
potentially selfish and disruptive (others’ dissent). Figure 2 illustrates a second continuum reflecting employees’ perceptions of others’ dissent.

While all four dimensions of loyalty are included in Figure 2, organizational loyalty and coworker loyalty are less frequently acknowledged by others. Figure 2 attempts to capture the way in which all dimensions of loyalties are present in other employees’ dissent, but the dissent action is perceived as binary with patient loyalty aligning with loyal dissent and personal loyalty aligning with disloyal dissent. In this way, my findings are consistent with other discussions of attribution theory and self-serving bias in organizations (Judge & Martocchio, 1995; Witt, Broach, Hilton, & Hellman, 1995). In this study, the tendency to see one’s own actions as nuanced, contextual, and multifaceted is juxtaposed with the tendency to see others’ actions as simple and based on static personality traits.
The final research question explored how loyalty in the workplace within this organizational culture influences employees’ perceptions of dissent. One strength of this study is the immersion in a single research setting, because it highlights the importance of organizational culture to the practice of dissent. Although most dissent scholars have acknowledged the role of organizational culture in dissent (Garner, 2007; Hegstrom, 1990; Kassing, 1997, 2012), nearly all recent dissent research used a quantitative methodology that cut across a range of organizations. Although these studies assess the reported forms of and audiences for dissent (Kassing, 1998, 2002), they do not provide the “thick description” of dissent in its cultural context within the organization (Geertz, 1973, p. 7). Through this research, I was able to detail the richness of culture as an intricate part of employees’ choices to dissent, and take organizational culture into account as I explored the relationship between loyalty and dissent. Using Hegstrom’s (1990) concept of the mimetic and dissent conditions in organizations, I examined the cultural conditions present in this single organization. In doing so, I found that this organization did not have a stable condition toward dissent (Hegstrom, 1990). While dissent may be welcomed on the macro level by top leaders, the micro practices of dismissing or discouraging dissent complicate the organization members’ understandings of how their dissent will be perceived. Examining organizational dissent within the cultural context, therefore, allows for the inherent complexities of the dissent experience to be better recognized.

The methodological and theoretical approach of this study involved a shift from examining the manifestations of dissent across a variety of organizations to exploring the
motivations of dissent within a single organizational culture. Because of this inductive approach, the dimensions of loyalty emerged as a framework that speaks to the importance of loyalty as a part of organizational culture, workplace communication choices in general, and choices to dissent specifically. I began this work because I noticed the absence of loyalty in the discussions of dissent. I end it seeing the importance and implications of loyalty in all workplace communication. Furthermore, these findings indicate that organizational culture influences and is influenced by the fluid system of loyalties that each employee balances every day. Therefore, I believe this work serves to begin a conversation about loyalties in the workplace as multiple, their presence as ubiquitous, and their implications as significant.

Having recapped the methods and major findings of this work, I now explore the theoretical and practical implications of this research. I also address the limitations of this project, as well as the directions for future study.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study emerge from the major findings of the research questions. The most important contribution of this study is the development of a new theoretical framework: the dimensions of loyalty. Where previous research explored the degree to which loyalty is enacted in a dissent situation (Farrell, 1983; Hirschman, 1970) and did not acknowledge multiple forms of loyalty, this work proposes that employees balance four distinct but interrelated dimensions of loyalty. In this framework, I consider loyalty fluid and dynamic, rather than a static characteristic or trait. Furthermore, I contend that loyalty is constructed and enacted as a part of
organizational culture (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1982). Figure 3 represents the dimensions of loyalty, illustrating the way in which employees weigh several fluid loyalties as they choose if and how they will dissent.

Figure 3: The Dimensions of Loyalty Framework

In the graphic representation of this framework, the four dimensions of loyalty represent concerns that are weighed against each other on a scale. The scale suggests that the weighing of loyalties is a constant process that works to either trigger communication action (e.g., speaking up) or reaffirm inaction (e.g., remaining silent). I further argue that the loyalty weights grow and shrink in light of the context. The process of weighing loyalties is always determined contextually; each type of loyalty will be shaped by unique
risks, perceptions, and social desirability. For example, patient loyalty and personal loyalty may typically weigh in favor of silence in a given situation. However, a shift in the context may grow the weight of patient loyalty and shrink the weight of personal loyalty, weighing in favor of dissenting about patient safety. For most employees, the scale typically balances in favor of inaction because the context continuously reinforces loyalties weighing in favor silence. Using a balance scale to represent the weighing of loyalties illustrates this constant process of considering loyalties in the workplace experience. In this way, the four diverse dimensions of loyalty represent important motivating factors in the communication decisions (of both action and silence) occurring in the workplace experience.

In addition, the dimensions of loyalty framework moves beyond existing debates about loyalty and dissent (Duska, 1985; Farrell, 1983; Hirschman, 1970; Larmer, 1992). Many of the theoretical disagreements about dissent and loyalty stem from the issue of reciprocation of loyalty in the workplace. In the same way that this framework allows for multiple objects of loyalty (organization, coworkers, patients, self), it also allows for multiple considerations of reciprocation in relation to the object of loyalty. The expectations for reciprocation stem from the type of loyalty expressed, and so the dimensions of loyalty framework allows for a much more complex assessment of loyalty in the action of dissent.

The participant narratives in this work confirm that dissent may be motivated by principle or personal-advantage (Graham, 1986; Hegstrom, 1999). However, the dimensions of loyalty indicate that the motivations for dissenting are far more nuanced
than those two categories. In addition, the finding that employees often view others’ dissent as loyal (if based on principle) or disloyal (if based on personal-advantage) may suggest that simple categorizations have shaped employees’ understandings of the possible types of dissent.

Because this research demonstrates the importance of the relationship between loyalty and dissent, it confirms the need for loyalty to be considered a part of the dissent model (Kassing, 1997, 1998, 2012). Kassing’s (2012) model considers the severity of the issue, the level of personal responsibility, and the feasibility of response from the dissenter’s perspective. In addition, he argues that organizational, interpersonal, and personal influences shape the dissenter’s actions. This study also explored the organizational influences (through culture), the interpersonal influences (through others’ perceptions of dissent), and personal influences (through individuals’ perceptions of dissent), but did so through the lens of loyalty. In that exploration, I found compelling evidence that loyalty spans and significantly shapes all three of those influences. Therefore, loyalty should be integrated into the existing model as a central part of the choice to dissent.

In addition, the close examination of this organizational culture both confirms and complicates Hegstrom’s (1990) argument about the mimetic and dissent conditions in organizations. I found evidence of both conditions in this research, supporting the existence and influence of the two conditions. However, participants’ narratives also indicated that the organization may not have a single condition. The macro and micro level interactions with organizational leaders and peer coworkers can illustrate a system
of differentiated conditions that compose the organization’s culture. While the macro level cultural influences set a tone for the organizational attitude toward dissent, the micro level influences can function to either reinforce the macro-organizational attitude or counter it. Considering that most dissent occurs on the micro level, I contend the micro level attitude toward dissent will be most indicative of whether upward dissent will occur. Therefore, exploring the macro and micro level experiences of employees is essential in better understanding the role organizational culture plays in workplace dissent.

The dimensions of loyalty framework articulated in this study does much to explain the underlying motivations of dissent. The framework would likely hold explanatory power in examining a variety of communication actions in organizations (e.g., change, resistance, identity, socialization). In this way, the dimensions of loyalty framework contributes to knowledge development in the broad field of organizational communication.

Practical Implications

In addition to scholarly knowledge development, two types of practical implications emerge from this work. First, organizations can take steps in order to create an environment of high loyalty that is open to dissent. Second, employees voicing dissent might draw several suggestions from this work about when and how to dissent.

From the organization’s perspective, loyalty is an excellent organizational benefit. To promote organizational loyalty in an ethical way, organizations should consider their role in reciprocating loyalty. Factors such as job security, fair wage, insurance
premiums, and feelings of interpersonal respect emerged from this work as concepts that would represent loyalty and foster reciprocation. Furthermore, employees described feeling the most loyalty to their organization when they felt that the organization honored their personal loyalties, such as family obligations, personal improvement, and values. Thus, developing an organization that respects employees' personal loyalties, specifically in the relationship between employees and direct supervisors, could foster a healthy work environment. Leaders might begin to shape this relationship by recognizing and acknowledging concerns that are driven by personal loyalties as potentially legitimate.

In addition, in order to truly foster an environment where dissent is a safe and healthy organizational process, organizations must evaluate the system they use for hearing and responding to dissent. Employees reported feeling most valued when their concerns were acknowledged and some action followed their dissent. Leaders should refrain from verbal and nonverbal behaviors that dismiss dissent (e.g., eye rolling, saying "don't rock the boat," not following up).

That said, not all dissent is fruitful. Regardless of the supervisor's evaluation of the quality of the dissent, employees considered it very important to receive some type of feedback about their concerns in a timely fashion. In fact, most employees indicated that they felt better about their dissent experience if their leader responded, regardless of whether they received the outcome for which they hoped. Thus, any feedback about employees' concerns is vital in the dissent experience.

If leaders believe the dissent is unhelpful, they should inquire about the motivation of the concern by using a dialogical approach to understand the loyalties
enacted through the dissent. Approaching dissent in this way may begin to uncover underlying issues in the organization. Over time, such interactions may shape the quality of dissent that emerges. Leaders could use guideline questions as a starting place for employee-leader discussions (e.g., “Could you provide a specific example of this problem?”; “What makes you concerned about this problem?”; “What would you change about the situation?”; “What specific actions do you think we could take to correct this situation?”). While these interactions may require more time from the leaders, the practice of recognizing dissent and addressing it with open communication contributes to shaping positive relationships in the workplace.

To further acknowledge workplace dissent, organizations can promote interpersonal support for dissent. Avoiding the informal pressures that silence dissent is difficult; however, hosting open forums and department meetings where professional and appropriate dissent is enacted and encouraged would begin to set a trend wherein speaking up does not become a form of coworker disloyalty.

Conversely, this research offers a series of practical insights for organizational members deciding whether and how to voice dissent. First, employees should consider the attitude toward dissent on the micro level (with coworkers) and the macro level (with the organization). To avoid the characterizations of negativity, employees should assess if their dissent is necessary. Next, when employees decide their dissent should be voiced, they should consider the audience of their dissent. Based on the topic of the concern and the severity of the concern, employees can identify the appropriate channels for speaking up. When the concern is particularly severe and is not attended to in a timely fashion,
employees may even consider circumventing their direct supervisors in order to resolve necessary issues (Kassing, 2002). However, employees should also be aware of the risk associated with circumventing the chain of command, as such action could further complicate perceptions of loyalty. Furthermore, when issues arise between peer level coworkers, it is best to first address concerns in a peer-to-peer articulated dissent fashion. This approach empowers peer-level coworkers to engage in dissent directly without the involvement of a supervisor. The use of department meetings and open forums could assist in removing the stigma of coworker disloyalty from peer-level articulated dissent.

Finally, when voicing dissent, employees should consider describing their own motivations in terms of loyalty. A work process issue that may seem minor to a supervisor could have implications for the larger organization or patient/client care. Making such implications visible through a clear explanation of motivating loyalties not only clarifies the argument, but makes it more credible. Further, describing the motivations highlights the opportunity for organizational growth and positive change, as well as the employee’s self-awareness and personal investment in workplace improvement. Describing concerns in a solution-oriented way recasts dissent from “merely whining” to thoughtfully contributing to the work environment.

The practical implications of this work reflect the complexity of organizational dissent. From both the organizational leaders' perspective and the individual employees’ perspective, this series of recommendations and implications could be used to reshape dissent in light of loyalty.
Limitations

Overall, this research represents a balanced exploration of the research site. Throughout the 17 interviews, perspectives repeated and emerged in patterns, even though they came from employees in a variety of work roles and with a wide range of tenure. All the same, there are several limitations to this research that precluded a more complete analysis of this department.

In order to protect participants and avoid any form of pressure or coercion, participation in this study was completely voluntary. Given the sensitive topic of the research and the process of data collection occurring on site, it was important that employees only participate if they were comfortable expressing their views. For whatever reasons (comfort expressing views, disinterest, etc.), some modalities within the department had very little participation in the study. In addition, while I did interview one employee from Hospital Z, the vast majority of employees worked at Hospital X, the location of on-site interviewing. Two employees worked at Hospital Y part time or in the past, but no employees who worked exclusively at Hospital Y chose to participate in the study. The study is limited by these shortcomings in participation.

Because this research explores the healthcare context, the study is further limited by the workers’ time constraints and emergencies. I interviewed employees during the workday, and while most interviewed at the beginning or end of their shifts, some came mid-shift. Most employees did not express concerns with time during their interviews. However, in two instances, the employees’ schedules forced the interview to go more quickly than it otherwise might have.
Future Directions

This research represents a first effort at exploring the relationship between loyalty and dissent outside of the discipline of business ethics. Because of the nuanced and exploratory nature of this work, a qualitative study using one-on-one interview data was an appropriate method. In the future, individual interviews could be supplemented by focus group data and even observation, allowing for an ethnographic understanding of dissent. This triangulation of data collection methods might expand the type of claims advanced in the work.

Furthermore, exploring the relationship between loyalty and dissent outside of a single research setting would also be a direction for future study. Using qualitative or quantitative methods, dissent and loyalty could be explored regarding employees in a specific career or work role, for small businesses, and for large companies. In addition, the conceptualization of loyalty and dissent in newspaper articles, organizational materials, and job applications could be fruitfully addressed by critical methods.

Given the amount of data collected for this study that related to leaders’ roles in dissent, further research could explore leaders’ understandings of dissent, their perceptions of dissenters, and their role in responding to dissent. Equally interesting, then, would be the employees’ views of their leaders’ management of dissent and attitude toward dissenters.

Finally, the articulation of the four dimensions of loyalty described in this work should be explored by future studies. The four dimensions that emerged from this research uniquely reflect the healthcare context. In other work contexts, different
loyalties may emerge that better reflect the function of loyalty in that context. Adding to the dimensions of loyalty will further develop the vocabulary of workplace loyalty in a way that will serve organizational communication knowledge development.

Conclusion

In this qualitative organizational study, I explored the relationship between loyalty and dissent. I found that loyalties in the workplace are multiple, and that individuals’ own dissent actions are seen in light of the complexity of loyalties. The perception of others’ dissent is shaped by loyalties that are generally attributed as clearly loyal (patients or coworkers) or disloyal (self-benefit), lacking the nuance of autobiographical descriptions of loyalty. Ultimately, the relationship between loyalty and dissent is a complex one. Acknowledging the various dimensions of loyalty and understanding dissent in terms of its motivating loyalties is important in developing a better understanding of and vocabulary for workplace dissent.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Recruitment script, for "Where Loyalties Lie: A Study of Workplace Dissent through the Lens of Loyalty" (identifying information has been changed)

To be used by the Director of Radiology

I'd like to tell you about a project for which the Organization Name's radiology department is partnering with a UNI graduate student. Katelyn Santy will be conducting research for her thesis project by studying our department over the next few weeks. Katelyn is interested in the communication regarding disagreement at work. Our department's working with Katelyn on this project is not a reflection of the work happening here; it is simply an opportunity that is a good fit for our department and for Katelyn. This project may benefit our department primarily by helping us learn more about the communication in our department.

Katelyn is interested in interviewing employees in all areas and positions, and the interviews will be fairly informal and last about 20-30 minutes. Organization Name has fully approved this project and is supportive of your participation; however, your participation is completely voluntary. If you are interested in participating, you may do so during shift changes, breaks, or periods of downtime on dates and times listed by meeting privately with Katelyn in the Director of Radiology's office (Tuesday, Thursday) or in the designated Conference Room (Friday). You may also contact Katelyn directly to set up an interview time/place outside of the workplace, or if you would like to pre-arrange a meeting time on the scheduled dates. The interviews are private, require no preparation, and anything you say during the interview will be kept confidential between you and Katelyn. Neither the Director of Radiology, nor the department supervisors, nor anyone else at Organization Name will have access to the raw data. Katelyn will ultimately prepare a report for our department; however, in that report all identifying information will be removed and all data will be presented in the aggregate when it is shared with our organization. If you have any questions, would like further information, or would like to participate in the study, please contact Katelyn using the email or phone number provided. Thank you for considering participating.
APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW
INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Where Loyalties Lie: A Study of Workplace Dissent through the Lens of Loyalty
Name of Investigator: Katelyn Santy

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

Nature and Purpose: The purpose of this research is to learn more about the relationship between dissent and loyalty in the workplace.

Explanation of Procedures: By participating in this study, you agree to one 20-30 minute one-on-one interview with the primary investigator. The interview will be audio recorded, and recordings will be destroyed after research is complete. By signing this form, you agree to the audio recording as well. In my finished academic report, I may use direct quotes from your interview. Your name will be changed to a pseudonym, and the words will not be directly connected with you. My finished thesis project will be available at the UNI library. In addition, I may use this data in the future for academic work such as papers presented at conferences or in publications.

Discomfort and Risks: Risks of participation are minimal. Risks of participation are similar to those experienced in day-to-day life. There are no foreseeable risks to participation.

Benefits and Compensation: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, apart from contributing to knowledge development.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. The summarized findings may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference. I will use pseudonyms in place of names.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all.

Questions: If you have questions about the study you may contact or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact Katelyn Santy or the project investigator’s faculty advisor Dr. Jayne Morgan at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-2680. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.
Agreement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant) (Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator) (Date)

(Signature of instructor/advisor) (Date)
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Opening:
Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. This interview will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and I will primarily be asking you to describe your experience in the workplace, specifically focusing on the disagreement you may sometimes feel at work. I would like to explain the process of informed consent as it relates to your participation in this study. It is important that you understand your rights as a participant and what you are agreeing to by participating. This sheet describes your risks and rights as a participant. Take a few minutes to read this over. If, after reading this information, you do give your informed consent to participate, please sign this form. Also, please let me know if you have any questions. I’d like to tape recording this interview to assist with my accuracy in gathering data. No one but me will review the recordings. I will store the recordings in a safe place and destroy all recordings and records after my study is complete. Do you consent to my recording this conversation? If you are ready, let’s begin.

Body:
1. In general, what types of things cause disagreement in the department?
2. How do you handle disagreement?
   Probes: What do you do? What types of actions do you take?
   To whom do you address concerns and under what circumstances?
   What is your motivation for handling disagreement that way?
   How do department leaders handle disagreement?
3. Give me an example of a time you disagreed with something that was happening in the workplace.
   Probe: How did you handle that?
4. How do you see others express their disagreement?
   Probe: Why do you think they handled disagreement in that way?
   What perceptions do you form of others as they express dissent?
5. What do you think of when I say the phrase “loyalty in the workplace”?
   Probe: In your workplace experience, to whom or to what are you loyal?
6. How do you think loyalty in the workplace relates to expressing disagreement, if at all?

Closing:
Is there anything that we have not talked about that you think is pertinent to disagreement at work? Do you have any questions for me? I will give you my contact information now, in case you would like speak with me at a later date. Thank you very much for your time.