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Full Length Research Paper

Worker Bees and Wild Roses: The Pleasure and Pain of Mid-Career Female Academics

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Drawing on self-identified metaphorical expressions that represent women at work, this paper discusses how a group of mid-career academic women experience their work and workplace. The research was prompted by consistently high number of female academics who remain in the mid-levels in the academic career ladder despite research that shows this group is ambitious and holds leadership aspirations. Understanding the experiences at the mid-career levels, by gaining insights into their workplace experiences, may further our knowledge of how to advance women in leadership. The research draws on the metaphoric descriptions provided by 28 mid-career women working across three Australian universities. Metaphors elicit hidden and implicit values about how the subjects respond and give meaning to their work and working conditions and have been used in organisational practices to disclose underlying issues. The findings discuss the positive and negative work and workplace associations disclosed by the participants. However, the findings suggests that women find pleasure and desire in and through their work. It is through their work that academic women experience self-expression, creativity and adding value. By focussing on the value of doing academic work and the rewards of contributing to academia, there is potential to enhance the capacity for mid-career women to thrive in academia and build the foundations for leadership.

Keywords: metaphors, mid-career academics, women, higher education

Introduction

The metaphor has been used as a way to understand phenomena and a way to think and communicate experiences (Egan, 1997; Goldstein 2005). Tapping into the communicative richness of a metaphor has the potential to reveal how subjects comprehend their context and how they generate meaning from their context (Haack, 1994). By analysing metaphors and making associations between communicative expressions and their meanings, the metaphorical expressions of the user disclose how situations are experienced (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

The use of metaphors as a way to clarify experience is wide ranging. In the field of medicine, metaphors associated with patients' experiences and illnesses aid in the communication between medical professionals and their patients (Korkmaz & Senol, 2014). The use of metaphors helps to clarify conceptions of illness and treatment that can override cultural and communication barriers. Metaphors have been analysed to better interpret how social and political groups influence public discourse and spaces to help shape their politics, action, and change (Delouis, 2014). Metaphors also play a significant role in legal analysis and communication. They are widely used to gauge and interpret conflict and mediation, and gender issues (Henderson, 2014). The educative value of metaphors underpins the critical role they play in clarification of how learning is taking

place, the impact on the learner and the teacher and the values and beliefs shared about learning (Boud & Hager, 2012; Nye, Foskey, & Edwards, 2013).

The use of metaphors in organisational research has been employed as a way to unpack the complexity of organisational identity (Cornelissen, 2006), and to further organisational theory making (Morgan, 2003; Prange, 1999). The relationship between the language of the metaphor and the underlying feelings they represent is based on identifying the figurative language links with the unconscious (McGlone, 2007). If used well, they are a useful tool for explaining organisational relationships and processes (Morgan, 1986; Tsoukas, 1991).

A value of metaphors is especially significant when you consider that the kinds of attitudes and beliefs embodied in metaphors. They usually allude to attitudes and beliefs that are often hidden from every day work dialogues and discussions. It is this kind of insight enabled through metaphors and through metaphoric analysis that may help to better understand work practices and, may in turn, explain gaps in performance or gaps in the organisation. For example, Ollilainen and Calasanti, (2007) proposed that the use of family metaphors in organisations, such as "at work we are like a family", maintains the division of

labour between men and women where women take on the emotional and nurturing tasks as would a mother figure. In the case of family metaphor, they tell us what it means for individuals to be working in that organisation and the nature of gendered working practices.

Interpreting Metaphors

There is no one way to interpret metaphors, therefore, in this research the interpretations are underpinned by a hermeneutical approach to analysis. Hermeneutical approaches are diverse, however, foundational to hermeneutical research is the ontological understanding that social phenomena and social action can be conceptualised and interpreted to produce insights about the social actors or actions being researched (Butler, 1998). Hermeneutical approaches stress the centrality of language to explain and interpret experiences (Gadamer, (2006). The purpose of the interpretation shapes the type of hermeneutic approach depending on whether interpretation seeks to uncover original meaning, clarify, challenge or deconstruct meaning to address power asymmetries, reveal tensions, and contradictions (Butler, 1998). The objective of this research on women in higher education is revelatory and critical in seeking to unpack the hidden experiences and practices of these actors within their organisational context. The interpretive process will guided by a critical approach that addresses issues related to power and how these may be deconstructed through language that is indicative of the actors' experiences within the organisational context.

Understanding the links between metaphors, as a form of language that aims to capture the phenomenon of working within an organisation, and the value of their revelations depends on the particular analytical approaches used to interpret and analyse the metaphorical meanings. Lakoff and Johnson, (2003), suggest that metaphors work to structure mental representations of often complex concepts and feelings. They argue that metaphors capture sensory experiences and represent not only the mind but also how the experience is felt. In other words, metaphors represent "abstract concepts 'embodied' in sensory experience" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p.5). Lakoff and Johnson's representation of metaphors as deliberate and specific expressions that provide insight into situations of complexity. This interpretive stance intersects with a critical hermeneutical approach where critical analysis of phenomena aims to challenge surface or conventional beliefs (Butler, 1998) delving into more hidden meanings. For example, if someone were to represent their working self as a 'worker ant', in addition to getting a sense of being part of a larger group, and comparing the self to ants, which suggests pulling above weight, being meticulous, organized, critical interpretive stance would interrogate the feelings associated with the experience that are embedded in the metaphor. Thus feelings of being overwhelmed, over controlled, regimented would also be part of the analysis. More deeply, the metaphor expresses an essential identification with powerlessness in the working context.

This paper extends the analysis of feelings by drawing on the work of Garrett (1996) who delved deeper into feelings that embody power or lack of power, by framing analysis based on the theory of affects (Garrett, 1996). Garrett specifically attributes emotional associations with metaphorical expressions and how each person engages their emotional vocabulary presents a way for individuals to articulate intellectual and bodily feelings associated with their experience. The basic emotional vocabulary is captured through base emotions of pain, pleasure and desire. These three emotions have been identified by Garrett as the primary responses that shape the relationship of others to others and to the world. These three affectives are the fundamental emotional tenors through which each individual maintains their essential being (Garrett, 1996).

How the pain, pleasure and desire are expressed in the workplace and through metaphors is as much a product of the individual as it is of the workplace and the affect it has on the individual. The metaphorical expressions about the workplace are co-constructed by the individual engaging with organisational structures and processes (Brown and Stenner, 2001). For example, if a worker describes the workplace as a 'playground', this metaphor suggests that for this individual, the workplace is construed as a joyful place that has a pleasurable effect on the individual. However, for another individual within the same workplace, the playground metaphor may not capture their unique experiences and organizational interactions. They may construe their workplace as a 'jungle', which is an image not readily associated with joy or pleasure.

In the context of the higher education workplace, the notion of pain may seem out of place. However, for the purposes of this paper and research, pain has been redefined sociologically by framing the emotion and its interpretation by drawing on Melzack and Wall's (1988) broader definition of pain, which takes a non-medicalised understanding of the sensation. They state,

The word 'pain' represents a category of experiences, signifying a multitude of different, unique experiences having different causes, and characterised by different qualities varying along a number of sensory, affective and evaluative dimensions (Melzack & Wall 1988, p. 161).

Affirming the socially constructed notion of pain and arguing that the sensation of pain has been prioritised over the emotion of pain, Bendelow and Williams (1995) also show the social and cultural construction of pain that gives it meaning. For example, describing someone as 'a pain', implies a negative emotional response to the person. In this case, how pain is experienced, demonstrated and evaluated depends on emotive interpretations of the social context relative to perceived 'painful' actions. Morris (1991) confirms that, "Pain is never the sole creation of our anatomy and physiology. It emerges only at the intersection of bodies, minds and cultures (Morris, 1991, p cited in Bendelow & Williams, 1995, p. 140).

Therefore, pain, as a negative emotive sensation is how the notion of pain is interpreted within the analysis. Similar interpretations

of pain as emotive responses have been used in investigating emotional conflict in workplaces, (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik & Alberts, 2006; Frost, 2003).

Research

A survey investigating workplace practices and experiences of mid-career female academics was administered to 28 female academics across three Australian Universities. The women were drawn from a range of disciplines, primarily Education, Health Sciences, Humanities, Business and Law. Their ages ranged from 20-55+, and 96% were from an English background (Australia, UK and USA). The metaphorical analysis is based on the responses to the survey question: Question: Think of a metaphor that best describes you at work. Twenty eight participants responded by submitting their metaphors.

Discussion

The purpose of hermeneutical informed research is to illuminate experience to increase understanding of that experience (Laverty, 2003). The quality of the interpretations of the experiences is dependent on the observer and how they are situated within the interpretive process. Laverty (2003) argues the need for the interpreter to be aware of their influence in the research process. Table 1.

In this research, my awareness of context, as a woman working in higher education, is shaping interpretations and this may be a limitation of the research and the interpretive processes. However, as the hermeneutical process of interpretation ultimately seeks "sensible meaning, free of inner contradictions" (Laverty, p.24). My insider knowledge of higher education context helps to frame "horizons and understandings possible" (p. 25) within the context so they are sensible and reliable interpretations.

The interpretation of metaphors will progress along two stages. The first stage will group the metaphors in order to specify the types of phenomena that the participants associated with their work and workplace. The analysis will draw from Lakoff and Johnson's notions that the concepts embodied in and by the metaphors represent sensory experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p.5). The second stage will delve further into the nature of the sensory experience and interpret the metaphors through Garretts's three primitive effectives.

In response to the survey question, *Think of a metaphor that best describes you at work*, the participants gave the following metaphors. These have been tabled into thematic concepts, as suggested by Lackoff and Johnson (2003).

Thematic Metaphors

Metaphor Animals	Metaphor People	Metaphor –other
Butterfly emerging from cocoon	Back seat driver	Solid as a rock
Raccoon- steals from rich	Cassandra	The meek shall inherit the earth
Monkey in a cage	Juggler	doormat
Worker bee	Explorer	Kaleidoscope of colour
Leunig's duck ¹	Late bloomer	Leaf in the wind
workhorse	Dancer	Footsteps on the beach
Fish out of water	Prisoner #416 ²	Wild rose
Duck- calm on surface working hard underneath	Quiet achiever	
Tortoise in (tortoise hare)	Contestant in egg and spoon race	
Darn cat	Gardener	
Echidna (prickly but vulnerable)		

Table 1 shows that metaphorical expressions related to animals figure highly in the way that the participants represent their work environment and work practices. There is a history of metaphors that connect women and animals, and in most cases, the connection has negative connotations for women. Being described as a 'bitch', a 'dog', and 'cow' implies women are unattractive, unworthy, mean. Other animal comparisons are less severe but equally negative. 'A social butterfly", 'a chick'

and 'fox', while not as disparaging, nevertheless denotes a frivolity and superficiality (Dunayer, Birke, & Kheel, 1995). When analysing the animal metaphors in table one, one theme is of hard work. The duck working hard beneath the surface, the workhorse, the worker bee and the tortoise, imply that women identify with the hard work and reinforce the notion that the workplace is associated with struggle and effort. A second theme is one of subversion. The raccoon is equated to the Robin

Hood of the animal world, the darn cat, refers to a fictional cat that gets into mischief, and Leunig's duck, is an innocent yet evocative character who goes against the mainstream. The workplace represents a place of potential subversion. The third theme is of the outsider. The monkey in a cage and the fish out of water, illustrate the alienating context that some of the women find themselves.

López Rodríguez (2009) explored the relationship between power and the metaphorical use of animals. Each culture endows animals with either positive or negative associations; therefore by identifying with a particular animal, the subject is expressing a connection to those qualities. Table 1 illustrates the use of animal metaphors as expressions of beliefs and values. By reviewing the use of animals in relation to power, the metaphors further the argument that some feel disempowered by their working relationships. For example, the worker bee and the workhorse metaphors both emphasise the labouring nature of work, suggesting the lower status of their worker practices. They identify with the powerlessness of a worker in a system that demands excessive levels of labour. López Rodríguez (2009) sums up this animal association thus,

Metaphorical identifications of marginal groups with animals may help express and perpetuate collective evaluations about their role in society, reinforcing stereotypes and, ultimately, pigeonholing people into the normative binary set of "the self" and "the other" (p.80).

The use of animals reinforces feeling of powerlessness of the women's selves, in comparison to the 'other'. The other represents those in positions of power who inhabit the locus of control that create the working conditions. The women are expressing that they do not feel that they are part of the locus of power. The metaphoric animal theme consolidates the feelings of powerlessness and lack of the capacity to direct and control behaviour. The animal metaphors reinforce the notion that control has been taken away. The most evocative of these images comes from the metaphor of the monkey in a cage and fish out of water. These metaphors reinforce being powerless,

that is feeling out of place and being controlled. Certainly, the prevalence of animal metaphors, 11 out of 28 metaphors, disclose issues with power and expressions of power within the workplace.

The second category of metaphors shows how the women associate their experience with another person. By unpacking the association, it is possible to determine primarily if the association is a positive or not so positive one. That is, the metaphors that rely on an association with another person draw on qualities similar or dissimilar qualities to give meaning to the individual experiences. For example, there are a number of metaphors that suggest that the women associate with other people's skills and values. For example, the gardener, the dancer, the late bloomer, the quiet achiever, and explorer all suggest professional and vocational capability and productivity. On the other hand, the hindering personifications captured in metaphors such as; back seat driver, juggler, Cassandra, and prisoner # 416, represent persons or actions as hindrances and incapacity either through lack of control, through over work or over control. When considering the people associated metaphors provided by the participants, they are divided equally between metaphors that are positive, and those not so positive.

The third category of metaphors is varied. These associations evoke representation of strength, such as solid as a rock, kaleidoscope of colour and wild rose. They also illustrate associations of powerlessness, as in, leaf in the wind, footsteps on a beach, doormat, and the meek shall inherit the earth. In the subsequent discussion, a more detailed analysis of these metaphors is provided.

Emotions in the Workplace

In order to focus analysis on the emotional meaning of the metaphors, the same 28 metaphors have been categorised according to the three basic affectives; pain, pleasure and desire. As suggested Garrett (1996), drawing on the theory of affects enables a deeper analysis of feelings that embody power or lack of power.

Basic emotions of the workplace

Metaphor Pain	Metaphor Pleasure	Metaphor -desire
Cassandra	Darn cat	Kaleidoscope of color
Prisoner #416	Raccoon- steals from rich	Footsteps on the beach
Monkey in a cage	Solid as a rock	Butterfly emerging from cocoon
Worker bee	Explorer	
The meek shall inherit the earth	Late bloomer	
workhorse	Dancer	
Fish out of water	Leunig's duck	
Duck- calm on surface working hard underneath	Quiet achiever	
Tortoise in (tortoise & hare)	Contestant in egg and spoon race	
doormat	Gardener	
Juggler		
Back seat driver		
Leaf in the wind		
Echidna (prickly but vulnerable)		

Table 2 shows how metaphors related to notions of pain. In the context of this study, the definition of pain is taken from Cupples (1992), in which pain is defined as a hurtful experience that has sensory, affective and evaluative dimensions. These three elements of pain are closely associated with the kinds of emotions experienced in the workplace. The definition is especially relevant considering how these emotions contribute to evaluating the workplace and its impact on the worker. Table 2 shows that 50 percent of the participants have evaluated their workplaces in a way that is associated with some painful experiences.

The metaphors of Cassandra, prisoner 416, monkey in a cage, 'the meek shall inherit the earth', and doormat are examples of metaphors of pain. What can be analysed from this grouping of metaphors is that pain, is a negative emotion that denotes a sense of loss. Cassandra alludes to the incapacity to have a voice, the incapacity to have her version of the truth heard and understood. In effect, it is the silencing of dissention. The prisoner #416 was especially highlighted in the Stanford prison experiment study for speaking out against abuse and injustice. The prisoner then became the target for abuse and bullying. The metaphor of doormat echoes these feelings. Similarly, the monkey in the cage metaphor illustrates the confinement and control mechanisms that reduce the participant to feeling inhumane. The biblical quote, 'the meek shall inherit the earth' affirms the feelings of powerlessness in the current context. Therefore, what can be drawn from one group of painful associations is that they disclose lack of power as the source of workplace pain.

The lack of power experienced by mid-career females reflects much earlier studies that drew similar conclusions. For example, a longitudinal study by Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) stated,

Research reveals a consistent difference favoring men in accessibility to, and utility of, resources for power. It suggests that the processes involved in the development of power differ for men and women and that the path to power for women resembles an obstacle course (p. 51).

Ragins and Sundstrom suggest that the processes of power differ between the genders. The metaphorical expressions regarding the lack of power, propose that the processes of power are blocked and that sources of power, such as speaking out, are channels not open to women.

The lack of control is also related to lack of power. Power is control over what other people do, however, lack of control means inability to decide your own outcomes (Inesi, Botti, Dubois, Rucker, Galinsky, 2011). Metaphors connected to lack of control also figure highly in the painful evaluations of midcareer female academics. For example, back seat driver, fish out of water and leaf in the wind indicate the feeling of not having capacity for control.

The third category of painful metaphors related directly to hard work. Workhorse, Duck- calm on surface working hard underneath, and juggler denote associations with labour, effort and menial taxing work. For women academics, their work is

more likely to be composed of more administrative and teaching work, which is vital for institutional purpose and operations, however it carries a lesser status that research work. There have been successive studies that show how the lack of research lessens opportunity for female academics' promotion and career progress (August, & Waltman, 2004; Lafferty & Fleming, 2000).

When analysisng the metaphors in terms of how they reflect painful experience of the workplace, table 2 shows that 50 percent of the participants equate their experiences to a painful affective. Analysis of the metaphors denoting pain shows that the source of pain shows that it emerges from the lack of power and control within the workplace.

However, institutional experiences of female academics also produce a sense of pleasure. Table 2 shows ten metaphors associated with a pleasure. There is the pleasure of discovery and achievement, explorer, gardener and late bloomer all show a sense of satisfaction and curiosity associated with academic work. The metaphor, solid as a rock, alludes to a sense of resilience. The women also allude to a sense of playfulness and joy. The dance, the Darn Cat, the raccoon stealing from the rich, a contestant in an egg and spoon race and Leunig's duck, all position the players in an irreverent way. They are having fun, making fun or creating fun in ways not entirely associated with the gravity of their work.

The final emotion expressed in table 2 is the metaphors of desire. Desire denotes potential want, and while it is also a source of pleasure, it is more future orientated. Viewing the workplace as a kaleidoscope of color suggests possibility, potential and choice. The metaphor of footsteps on the beach, presents a poignant image of freedom. The notion of desire and possibility is perhaps no better captured than the metaphor of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. The image has been traditionally related to renewal and re-emergence. The metaphors of desire number only three out of the 28.

Implications for Mid-Career Female Academics

Schön (1993) has argued how the narrative around metaphors is a powerful tool in expressing the nature of social problems. Applying this argument to the research results suggests a driving narrative around disempowerment that shape the thinking and practices of mid-career female academics. The workplace rarely presents an idealistic space for either gender. However, as suggested by Tsoukas and Knudsen (2005), how far our idealised work transgresses from our reality can be indicative of how the workplace meets our expectations and what is possible within the workplace. The metaphorical expressions (table 2.) expresses a lack of power, a source of metaphorical pain, as a recurring theme in how mid-career female academics appraise their value in the work spaces. Taking the example of the metaphor of Cassandra, the myth recites a tale of a woman, with the power to foresee the future, being ostracized and ridiculed by others, especially after she refused to submit to her boss. The metaphor is tragic. In the workplace context, the capacity of the woman to use an extraordinary skill is disempowered. There

are other metaphors which connect the feeling of pain with the lack of power in working relationships. Doormat, backseat driver, the meek shall inherit the earth; all express a lack of power within relationships.

Pleasure and Desire: Women and Resistance

The recent changes to higher education have ensured that the academic/worker has less and less control over their workplace changes and has less autonomy in the way they meet their work requirements (Deem, 1999). Therefore, it can be argued that in this context, metaphors expressing the lack of power are reflective of broader higher education changes in which the academic has less control and autonomy in their work and in how their workplace is managed.

While the metaphors discussed so far emphasize the women's belief about their lack of power within their organisations, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that in almost equal proportions, the women also present metaphors associated with pleasure and desire. These are more positive associations with their workplace and their work. The metaphors related to pleasure associate academic work with the sense of gratification and achievement that it brings. Metaphors such as; the late bloomer, the explorer, the gardener, the dancer and the quiet achiever, allude to personal achievement, discovery and fulfilment. These metaphors suggest the sense of fulfilment from the work offers a more positive representation of the workplace.

Hey (2004) explored how academic women shaped their professional and personal identities through the concept of pleasure. She argued that how female academics navigated the climate of higher education with their "commitment to intellectual labour" (p.33) or perhaps, over commitment, to their intellectual academic work was one of those 'elusive' and 'secret' drivers in how women construct their academic identities. Similar results showing female academics' contradictory responses to organisational loyalty have been noted by Author (2012). The author highlighted how women could endure a workplace that disempowered their capacity for autonomy that restricted their voice within the academy and presented persistent entrenched obstacles, if they could experience worthy and expressive work. Hey suggests that women are seduced by the work. The metaphors expressing pleasure, as tabulated in table 2, do identify with a sense of personal fulfilment and enjoyment that run contrary to the constriction and control metaphors. However, further research would be needed as to the complexity of the responses in relation to significant expressions of disempowerment. It is difficult to conclude whether the contradiction can be attributed to a gendered experience of higher education workplaces or indeed, the contradiction is due to the diversity of responses among the mid-career academics. Perhaps, the sample group does have a myriad of experiences that may be more about the individual rather than the group.

Conclusion

By deconstructing and analysing the metaphors of 28 female academics, this paper has presented the organisational experiences as conceptualised by this group of mid-career women. One of the issues of conducting this hermeneutical framed research is the quality of the interpretation and the cultural and social experiences and insights brought to the analysis by the researcher. However, rather than being an outsider to the context, my own experience, as a mid-career female working in higher education, has helped to give an accuracy to the interpretations. Another limitation is the culturally mediated interpretations of metaphors. In another cultural context, the interpretations can differ. Therefore, the conclusions and inferences of the research need to account for the specific cultural context in which this research was conducted. There is scope to investigate further, in other cultural contexts.

With these limitations in mind, the research shows that for this group of women, the work context is represented as a place of struggle. Metaphors that emphasise the lack of power, the lack of the capacity to influence governance and the feelings that the women are the 'losers' corresponds with other research (Ledwith, & Manfredi, 2000) that highlight the predominance of institutional gendered power relations in higher education. The gendered aspect of the higher education workplace is not evident through the use of gendered metaphors; rather the metaphors are graphic representations of women grappling with perceptions of their disempowerment. Conceptions of constriction, isolation and struggle build a powerful narrative of disaffection with organisational structures and relations.

The use of metaphors in research raises awareness about potential for theory building (Foropon & McLachlin, 2013). Boxenbaum and Rouleau (2011) argue that theories require empirical content, theoretical concepts and metaphors as a way to communicate and clarify ideas. The higher education space continues to be a difficult space for women. The difficulty is especially evident in the mid-career spaces where the experiences of working are perceived in such a negative light. It is also that this hierarchical level where most women will reach the limit of their career in terms of academic progress and promotion. Research on the gendered organisation, especially, in higher education has persistently stressed that women's experiences are hampered by traditional and hierarchical structures that women find incompatible with building their capacity. Metaphorical analysis can further the gendered understanding of higher education and show the impact on the professional and personal lives of women.

However, metaphors can be used to generate insight and further theorising about how organisations function (Bacharach, 1989). In this case, the research shows that for all the isolation and lack of power experienced by this subset of women in the study, the workplace is also a place of rebelliousness, and a capacity for productivity and positivity. The imagery of rebelliousness can be a starting point to generate new propositions about women and their experiences of higher education work, beginning with

their practices of subversion and creativity. Gendered analysis of organisation has focussed on ways in which "gender is done" and women are excluded" (Tienari et.al., 2013, pp. 43). The research suggests that using the metaphors of desire and pleasure may be ways to generate a different understanding and theories of gendered organisations that represent women's experiences of pleasure, rebelliousness and discovery to generate understandings about how women can better 'dance' within academia.

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¹ Leunig's Duck is a popular Australian cartoon duck that appears authentic and therefore often out of place, in a range of settings thereby suggesting a defiant quality.

² Based on The Stanford Prison Experiment, the number of the prisoner who succumbs to peer pressure.