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Collegiality: leading us into fantasy - the paradoxical resilience of collegiality in academic leadership

Giedre Kligyte^{1*}, Simon Barrie²

¹*Learning and Teaching Unit, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia*

²*Institute for Teaching and Learning, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia*

* Corresponding author. Email: g.kligyte@unsw.edu.au

It has been argued that leadership in higher education differs from leadership in other organizational contexts in part because of the culture of collegiality and autonomy underpinning academic work. Collegiality, however, is a complex and somewhat ‘slippery’ idea that features in academic leadership literature in a variety of, sometimes contradictory, ways. We argue for the need to unpack and explore the notion of collegiality to understand what makes it such an enduring idea in academic leadership. We start by examining the multiple meanings of collegiality circulating in scholarly writing on leadership to reveal the complexity and tensions it raises for academic leaders. We then turn to Lacanian theory and explore collegiality as a subliminal fantasy that represents an important interface between ‘leaders’ and those who are ‘led’, and one which influences our understanding of academic work and leadership. From the perspective offered by our Lacanian exploration, we propose that in order to traverse the nostalgic fantasy of the collegial past, instead of looking for closure, it might be more useful to put indeterminacy, absence, and lack at the centre of the academic leadership project.

Keywords: collegiality, academic leadership, fantasy

Introduction

‘(...) to have a hope of changing an institution with eons of history, you have to tap into some aspects of existing cultures’.

(Fullan & Scott, 2009, p. 69)

Those assuming leadership roles in today’s unstable university environments (Amaral, Meek & Larsen, 2003; Anderson, Johnson & Saha, 2002; Marginson & Considine, 2000) work in increasingly unfamiliar territory often with a repertoire of largely historical leadership strategies (Scott, 2011; Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). Today’s university leaders have to respond to external demands with business-like efficiency and accountability, while navigating the maze of diverging cultural norms, narratives and work ethos of academic environments (Amaral et al., 2003; Bryman, 2007; Dill, 1982; Knight & Trowler, 2000; Middlehurst, Goreham & Woodfield, 2009; Scott, 2011; Spiller, 2010).

Much of the writing in higher education highlights how academic leadership differs from other organizational contexts because of the structural complexity, decentralization, and the culture of collegiality and autonomy underpinning academic work (Burnes, Wend & By, 2013; Knight & Trowler, 2000; Middlehurst et al., 2009; Silver, 2003). It is proposed by some authors that higher education requires more collaborative and indirect leadership than other contexts (Bryman, 2007; Knight & Trowler, 2000; Scott, et al., 2008). Despite the recognition of the uniqueness of the academic environment, there is little published research exploring academic leadership in terms of some of the key cultural aspects it relies on, works within or even operates against. We propose that in order to more fully understand the challenges facing academic leadership it is important to explore the key features of the academic cultures in which it is situated. We share Barnett’s (1990, p. 97) view of academic culture as ‘a

shared set of meanings, beliefs, understandings and ideas; in short, a taken-for-granted way of life, in which there is a reasonably clear difference between those on the inside and those on the outside of the community'. Since any academic context incorporates heterogeneity and decentralization at the core (Silver, 2003), we see that it is more appropriate to talk about academic cultures in plural form.

One of the key aspects of the academic cultures that leadership works alongside is collegiality (Burnes, et al., 2013; Knight & Trowler, 2000; Spiller, 2010; Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010). Collegiality, in many ways, represents the interface and connection between 'leaders' and those who are led. It features in the higher education and academic leadership literature in a variety of, sometimes contradictory, ways. For instance, collegiality is cited as a component of effective leadership (Bryman, 2008; Knight & Trowler, 2000; Scott, et al., 2008.); an element of academic ethos that leaders can leverage (Bode, 1999; Boice, 1992; Macfarlane, 2007); a vital if outmoded university governance and decision-making structure (Marginson & Considine, 2000; Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010); a problem to be overcome by good leadership (Burnes, et al., 2013; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Ramsden 1989); a defense against managerialist leadership gone astray (Rowland, 2008; Nixon, 2004) and so on. Despite these contradictions, the majority of these authors agree that collegiality is at the very heart of a university – as Tapper and Palfreyman (2010, p. 17) put it, 'it is the embodiment of the idea of collegiality that distinguishes a university from an institution of higher education as simply a managed machine for teaching at the tertiary level.' This view is supported by several studies that identified collegiality as an extraordinarily resilient idea in the academic psyche despite sweeping changes to university practices (see Anderson et al., 2002; Archer, 2008; Macfarlane & Cheng, 2008; Spiller, 2010; Ylijoki, 2005).

We argue for the need to unpack and explore the significance of collegiality for the academic community, and, in particular, to understand what makes collegiality such an enduring and appealing feature in conceptualizing leadership and leadership practices in higher education. We start by examining the multiple meanings of collegiality circulating in higher education and academic leadership literature to reveal the complexity of ways that collegiality is being talked about, and the tensions it raises for academic leaders in practical terms. We then turn to Lacanian theory and use the perspective it offers on the role of the subconscious in academics' responses to changes in higher education. We problematise the tendency to reify the notion of collegiality, revealing the limitations of conceiving it in simplistic terms as an opposition to management and managerialism (see Amaral, et al., 2003; Anderson, et al., 2002; Spiller, 2010), and instead propose that viewing the powerful, but largely tacit collegiality idea as a subliminal fantasy influencing our understanding of academic work, might illuminate the ways we tend to conceptualise leadership in higher education.

The 'idea' of collegiality

While it could be argued that the idea of collegiality historically emerged from the collegiate universities in the UK with a defining structural characteristic of federal governance and largely autonomous colleges (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010), collegiality as an idea has a much wider reach in a diversity of international higher education contexts today (Amaral, et al., 2003; Burnes, et al., 2013).

Collegiality - a governance and decision-making structure

There is a significant body of scholarly writing on collegiality, which focuses on the ways it is embedded within university governance and decision-making structures.

Historical analyses of changes to the higher education sector in recent years typically draw a picture of a gradual decline of collegial governance practices with the rise of more managerial approaches (Burnes, et al., 2013; Macfarlane, 2005; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Tapper & Palfreyman 2010). However, the remnants of collegial structures, such as governance through Academic Boards and Senates, federal funding of departments, consensual decision-making through committees, and other collegial leadership mechanisms persist and continue to influence academic cultures (Marginson & Considine, 2000).

Understandings of collegiality in terms of governance could be traced back to the seminal work of Max Weber on social structural arrangements, where the principle of collegiality is described as serving 'to divide the powers of a monocratic chief by placing limits on these powers' (as cited in Waters, 1989, p. 951). According to a Weberian analysis undertaken by Waters (1989), key components of collegial authority are expertise, equality, consensus and specialisation. He defines collegial governance structure as a 'dominant orientation to a consensus achieved between the members of the body of experts who are theoretically equal in their levels of expertise but who are specialised by area of expertise' (Waters, 1989, p. 956). This view of collegiality implies certain ethical norms. For instance, the work carried out in a collegiate organization is not seen as determined by the contract of employment, self-interest, or interests of others, but by 'a set of vocational commitments to suprapersonal norms' (Waters, 1989, p. 957), and the claim to authority is based almost solely on expertise. The collegiate beginnings of universities in Australia exemplify this fact – academic work was not regulated by industrial law and academics were not considered to be 'workers' or 'employees' until the Dawkins reforms in the 1980's (Anderson, et al., 2002). Building on the expert status of its members, this ideal type of a collegial

organization is fundamentally decentralised. Leadership in this type of organization is collective and decisions can only be achieved through expertise and consensus.

This 'ideal type' of a collegiate organization is a theoretical construct, and no university represents (or has represented) it in its pure form (Burnes, et al., 2013; Marginson & Considine, 2000). There is no defined model or a template determining how collegial governance ought to be organized, and historically, it was implemented in a variety of ways depending on the time of the establishment of a specific university, and its context (Burnes, et al., 2013). Collegial governance seems to have enjoyed its 'golden age' prior to the 1960s in Australia and the UK, when universities were small, largely inward-focused, and autonomous organizations (Burnes, et al., 2013; Marginson & Considine, 2000). However, the spirit of a Weberian collegial organization still fuels the imaginations of those working in academia, if not in terms of actually participating in decision-making (Macfarlane, 2005), then lamenting the loss of this privilege and the autonomy that comes with it (Anderson, et al., 2002).

From the perspective of leadership, collegial governance raises a number of issues. Firstly, power in a collegial organization is dispersed among experts enjoying significant autonomy. Secondly, due to the dependence on consensus in decision-making, such an organization is inherently conservative and unable to rapidly respond to changes in the environment (Burnes, et al., 2013). Even at the turn of the 20th century, Weber made an observation that bureaucratic governance was superior and he was doubtful about the future of collegiality, due to its inefficiency (Waters, 1989). The reliance on collegial consensus can result in the inability to make any decisions at all. In his study on academic leadership, Ramsden (1989, p. 24-25) suggests that collegiality together with its 'first cousins' autonomy, academic freedom and professionalism is often used by academics to 'block all progress' or as one of the 'weapons against

change' (Fullan & Scott, 2009, p. 29). As collegial governance structure elevates the expert status of an individual academic above that of an employee in any other organization, new conceptions of academic leadership, such as shared leadership (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003), distributed leadership (Bolden, Petrov & Gosling, 2009) or interactional leadership (Knight & Trowler, 2000) have been introduced. Since collegial governance structure appears to be linked to ethical norms (Waters, 1989), it is not surprising that changes to structural arrangements in higher education institutions are felt as loss of values in academics' imaginary.

Collegiality – allegiance to disciplinary knowledge community

Collegiality is also discussed in higher education literature as academics' allegiance to disciplinary communities. Collegiality in this sense could be understood as the collaboration of mutually respectful equals with the aim of achieving shared disciplinary research goals (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010). However, at a more fundamental level this understanding of collegiality has to do with preserving the primacy of knowledge and supporting the continuity of ideas as the core purpose of academia. Collegiality in terms of disciplinary knowledge is underpinned by the belief that due to the inherent limits of an individual intellect, ideas must be shared in order for others to build on them and advance the overall knowledge (Rüegg, 1986; Shils, 1975). Similar to the notion of 'communism' conceptualized by Merton as one of the core institutional norms underpinning academic work (1996), the principle of disciplinary collegiality mandates that all new knowledge, including its methods, are made public, and put under scrutiny through peer review before they become part of the public knowledge. In this sense, disciplinary collegiality does not always imply harmonious collaboration (Tannen 2002), and might involve tense debates, that are conducted, however, with implicit appreciation of how the disagreement contributes and expands

the knowledge in the field. Rowland (2008, p. 355) describes the imperative for collegial sharing and collaboration in terms of 'intellectual love', which is 'a logical implication of the search for knowledge'.

Collegiality in the disciplinary knowledge dominion can also imply egalitarianism, which dictates that knowledge must be considered on its own merit, no matter who it came from (Rüegg, 1986). As such, a research student's and a professor's work would presumably be judged on the robustness of the research and contribution to knowledge, disregarding the formal status or institutional affiliation of particular individuals. This formal egalitarianism in terms of knowledge establishes an individual academic's status as a peer and a colleague. Additionally, although disciplinary collegiality is focused more on contributing to the dispersed knowledge community rather than on aspects of teaching and serving a particular institution (Macfarlane 2005), this view of collegiality still mandates new discipline member enculturation into the academic community through teaching and mentoring (Macfarlane 2007; Rowland, 2008; Rüegg, 1986; Shils, 1975).

Just as literature on governance described the decline of collegiality, disciplinary collegiality is also seen as being eroded by managerial practices in universities through the shift from self-determined pure research to innovation and knowledge application (Taylor, 2008; Ylijoki, 2005). In particular, it is proposed by some authors that the culture of auditing and measuring research output gives rise to hostility, acquisitiveness and competitiveness in academic communities, which is destructive to 'intellectual love' (Rowland, 2008). Epistemological fragmentation of disciplines and increasing specialisation due to research assessment exercises is also seen as contributing to the decline of collegiality within disciplinary communities (Macfarlane, 2005).

The commitment to collegiality with the purpose of advancing knowledge might be seen as a core ethical norm in academia going beyond individual or institutional interests, as an element of ‘suprapersonal norms’ referred to by Waters (1989, p. 957). A number of authors (Knight & Trowler, 2000; Macfarlane, 2005; Malcom & Zukas, 2009;) suggest that belonging to disciplinary communities, also described as academic ‘tribes’ by Becher and Trowler (2001), has long been the first point of identity for academics. The allegiance to disciplinary communities could explain why collegiality appears to be better preserved at departmental level, sometimes resulting in narrow departmentalism at the expense of the broader institutional community (Macfarlane, 2005).

Disciplinary collegiality shifts the focal point of academic endeavour outside of a specific higher education organization (Delanty, 2008; Dill, 1982; Malcom & Zukas, 2009; Shils, 1975). This presents particular challenges for leadership by weakening academics’ allegiance to a particular institution, and curtailing the desire to lead, or be led by anyone, within that institution. Marginson and Considine (2000, p. 10) describe deliberate attempts by university management to move towards cross-disciplinary centres and schools as ‘flattening out the distinctions between different types of knowledges’ to reduce the autonomy and power exercised by the disciplinary communities, perceived by university executives as a more dangerous power than that of collegial university governance.

Collegiality - a behavioural norm

Collegiality in higher education literature is also referred to as a behavioural norm, the ‘glue’ that holds an academic community together (Macfarlane, 2005; 2007). Macfarlane (2007; 2005) explores this understanding of collegiality through the related though not identical concept of academic citizenship. Collegiality here is understood as

the individual’s ability to respectfully work with others towards common goals, including social and intellectual engagement with colleagues (Bode, 1999; Seigel, 2004; Urgo, 2007), and participation in institutional administrative, managerial and mentoring processes (Macfarlane, 2007). This view of collegiality focuses on the ‘service’ or ‘administration’ aspects of an academic role, and, in contrast to the disciplinary collegiality outlined earlier, it is mostly concerned with local institutional contexts.

Collegiality as a behavioural norm arises from and, in turn, shapes the culture of the organization, which has the potential to ‘profoundly affect atmosphere, morale, communications, efficiency, adaptiveness and innovativeness within an institution’ (Handy, 1976, p. 177 as cited in Land, 2004, p. 164). Collegiality here is seen as an attitude and a social process that results in a sense of community and commensality leading to long-term loyalty to a particular organization (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010). If nothing else, collegiality and commensality can reduce tensions in an academic workplace and ensure that situations that involve diverging opinions and positions can be resolved in good faith (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010). Furthermore, as a dimension of academic culture, collegiality is often linked to enhanced opportunities for professional development, where collegiality is seen as the main conduit of values and practices enabling enculturation of newcomers into academia and specific institutional contexts (Bode, 1999; Boice, 1992; Macfarlane, 2007). Therefore, it is argued by some authors, that collegiality should be supported and developed to enhance and advance collegial culture further (Bode, 1999; Boice, 1992).

The role of academic leadership in this context is seen as nurturing and building on collegial spirit in local institutional contexts (Scott, et al., 2008), and fostering academics’ sense of loyalty to the whole university or broader academia in contrast to narrow departmentalism (Macfarlane, 2007).

The paradoxical resilience of collegiality

Regardless of which particular 'idea' of collegiality is evoked, it is a recurring feature of the literature of leadership in universities. Yet the notion of collegiality as a Weberian 'ideal type' – a fictional abstraction of a harmonious community of disciplinary experts, is difficult to work with and build on for academic leaders. For instance, Spiller (2010, p. 688) notes that collegiality presents significant conceptual barriers to academic leaders as they try to reconcile their personal beliefs about academic work, including 'collegiality folklore', with the external managerial demands in the current context of higher education. Despite these conceptual difficulties, repeated preoccupation with collegiality surfaces in Spiller's (2010) study as one of the most pervasive beliefs by academic leaders about the nature of their work. Academics' fixation on the idea of collegiality is corroborated by several studies highlighting collegiality as one of the core values espoused by those working in academia at all levels (Anderson, et al., 2002; Macfarlane & Cheng, 2008), from early career academics (Archer, 2008) to departmental chairs, and in a range of international contexts (Ylijoki, 2005; Amaral, et al., 2003).

Our proposition is that the various meanings of collegiality tend to be conflated in our thinking and writing, leading to a disconnect between academic practices and the idealised notion of collegiality, which becomes an 'empty signifier' – something that stands for everything and nothing (Caesar, 2007). We suggest that collegiality cannot be viewed as a self-evident and unproblematic fundamental value. On the contrary, collegiality seems to be an extraordinarily slippery and elastic concept – an idea in flux, a notion without a fixed meaning, which, however, appears to be very powerful in shaping academics' and academic leaders' beliefs about academic work.

Why, given such difficulties and limitations, is collegiality such a resilient and recurring element of our thinking and writing about leadership in universities? To help explore the paradoxical resilience of the idea of collegiality in the context of higher education (see Churchman & King, 2009; Rowland, 2008) we turn to psychoanalytic concepts and explore the roles of the subconscious and fantasy in academics' responses to changes in higher education.

Analytical framework

Our analysis of the role of collegiality as a resilient aspect of academic cultures and academic leadership is principally informed by Lacanian theory. Although the initial focus of psychoanalysis has been on an individual in a clinical setting, Lacanian philosophy and his analyses of enjoyment, fantasy, and desire, have been widely used in political theory to explore sociopolitical issues, such as nationalism, ideology, and ethics (Glynos, 2010), and more recently to theorise work in organizations (Cederström & Hoedemaekers, 2010).

Using Lacanian theory we sketch out an interpretive view of academia, highlighting the collective aspects of academics' aspirations gleaned from the literature on collegiality, particularly in terms of recent changes in higher education. By using psychoanalytical concepts we do not wish to pathologise or stereotype organizations or academics working in them, and we do not suggest that the 'social ills' in academia can be 'cured' through this analysis. Instead, we wish to utilise psychoanalytic theory to illuminate aspects of academic cultures that might offer unique insights in terms of conceptualising and operationalizing academic leadership.

Lacanian philosophy is underpinned by the belief that the sense of *lack* and *desire* is intrinsic to the human condition due to the perceived loss of the unmediated 'real', which is 'taken away' from individuals through introduction of symbolic

language. Any naming of the subject or the world around her is inaccurate, alienating and incomplete, and cannot ever capture the imagined 'real'. The individual is left always desiring and lacking. The subject attempts to become complete through continuous acts of identification, but the stable identity is never achieved – as soon as one thinks that one has pinned down some meaning, one realises that 'this is not it' (Stavrakakis 1999).

Fantasy and the imaginary in Lacanian theory enter the picture when individuals aim to bridge this gap between what is desired (the 'real') and what is available through the language and the discourse. Fantasy is the promise that the 'real' (often conceived as a lost state of harmony) could be achieved or returned to in some way. The fantasy often includes the 'Other' – something that prohibits the individual from achieving the pre-symbolic state of fullness (Stavrakakis 1999). A key point is that fantasy in Lacan's view is not limited to its every day meaning of something unrealistic (Clarke 2012). It is understood in a much broader sense as the foundational way that 'subjects are gripped by, and derive enjoyment from, discourses and practices in ways that lie beyond or outside the latter's rational or symbolic content.' (Clarke, 2012, p. 7).

Enjoyment (jouissance) in Lacanian philosophy is linked to the primordial state of the *real* and is conceptualised in terms of loss. As such, it does not equate with pleasure, but signifies the impossibility of the 'real', which is sometimes experienced as suffering (Glynos, 2008). Enjoyment is intrinsically linked to transgression: 'a subject transgresses the ideals it espouses because the subject enjoys its self-transgressive activity' (Glynos, 2008, p. 679). Paradoxically, this transgression is what strengthens the grip of the fantasy.

Dislocation in Lacanian philosophy is the moment of *contingency* where the gaps in the social reality and taken-for-granted rules and practices are made visible,

which enables new constructions of reality. The sedimentation of reality 'requires a forgetting of origins, a forgetting of the contingent force of dislocation which stands at its foundation; it requires a symbolic and fantasmatic reduction' of the reality (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 73). Fantasy induces 'subjects to ignore, overlook or forget the situated partiality and contingency of a particular discourse or practice' (Clarke, 2012, p. 7). The radical alternative to a fantasmatic view of the world is the view of social reality as constituted by and built on difference and contingency, which is necessarily imperfect and does not result in harmony. Essentially, it is the understanding that 'it could be otherwise'.

Understanding the resilience of collegiality

As outlined earlier, collegiality is often discussed in the higher education literature in terms of its absence or demise. Many authors note that the idea of collegiality is tinged with nostalgia for the idealized harmonious past, where, it is imagined, academics had the time and opportunities to engage in significant research, excite and inspire bright young minds through teaching, participate in and contribute to institutional and disciplinary academic communities, think, reflect, and, generally, do self-determined meaningful work (Cassidy, 1998; Taylor, 2008; Ylijoki, 2005). This idealized imaginary is contrasted with the well-documented confusion, isolation, anger and dismay that many academics feel when experiencing competing demands in universities today (Churchman & King, 2009; Smith, 2010; Taylor, 2008). Several authors argue that the demands extrinsic to the values of the academy are imposed on those practicing in universities, and the values and identities previously held by academics are systematically taken away by the new managerial regimes (Anderson, et al., 2002; Churchman & King, 2009; Rowland, 2008). The fundamental sense of loss and disenchantment frequently attributed to the erosion of collegial culture in academia is

perceived as one of the challenges academic leadership has to address (Anderson, et al., 2002).

In Lacanian terms the nostalgia for the golden age of collegiality could be seen as the beatific scenario promising ‘imaginary fullness or wholeness’ (Glynos, 2010, p. 29), which is contrasted with the horrific side of the fantasy: a tragedy of managerial practices obliterating academic values. Using Lacanian negative ontology, an academic subject can be conceptualised as fundamentally lacking and driven by the desire to return to the ‘real’, the state of imagined completeness. In this instance, we propose, the fantasy of fullness is a collegial community where the subject is conceived of as a highly regarded expert, a peer, a valued member in the institutional decision making process, a fair-minded scholar working on important research and sharing knowledge within disciplinary communities, a friendly and supportive colleague loyal to her institution, and so on. The desire for what could be termed as a more ‘real’ being and working in academia surfaces in much of writing on academic identities, authenticity and values, which is contrasted with pressures to comply and produce ‘hollowed-out’, performative, and inauthentic constructions of the self (see for instance, Archer, 2008; Churchman & King, 2009; Davies & Petersen, 2005; Macfarlane, 2007). The nostalgic collegiality ideal is, however, unattainable, as in Lacanian philosophy, ‘the subject (as a subject of desire) survives only insofar as its desire remains unsatisfied’ (Glynos, 2010, p. 29). An academic subject goes through a chain of identifications with the collegiality ideal, which does not bring her closer to the imagined idealised state, as she always realises that whatever is now ‘is not it’ – collegial practices in any academic context always pale in comparison to the imagined collegiality of the past.

In this scenario, higher education leaders are established as the ‘Other’ and conceived of as the obstacle preventing an academic subject from returning to the

desired collegiality ideal. In the study by Anderson, et al. (2002), academics repeatedly make ‘scathing, cynical and abusive comments’ (p. 53) describing university leadership teams as being from ‘a different planet’, ‘lacking empathy’ and ‘building walls around themselves’, with both sides feeling ‘contempt for the other’ (p. 51), and with very few academics demonstrating any empathy for their leaders. Similarly, Marginson and Considine (2000, p. 2) note that academics ‘will side with students, colleagues in other institutions, or with abstract principles, rather than with their own managers’. From a Lacanian perspective, the tendency for simplistic interpretation and binary representation of the complex relationships in academia allows for a difference to be constructed and a distance from the ‘Other’ (for example, leaders, administrators, or students) to be established. Collegiality signifies the status of the academic as an expert, a scholar, and stands for everything that renders academic work different from any other work, particularly from managerial practices. The conceptual dissonance described by Spiller (2010), between the collegiality ideal and the leadership realities of managing budgets, workloads and people faced by departmental chairs, highlights the fact that many academic leaders see themselves as academics first and foremost, and conceive of taking up a leadership position as shifting their allegiance and crossing into ‘the dark side’ of management. Similarly, the perception by former colleagues that those who move into leadership positions change; ‘turning their backs on core academic values’ (Spiller, 2010, p. 689), and securing these positions through ‘raw self-interest’ and ‘cunning (...) entrepreneurialism rather than knowledge, wisdom and commitment’ (Anderson, et al., 2002, p. 52).

Managerialism in universities, the obstacle preventing the return to the collegiality fantasy, is imagined as a mere difficulty that could be overcome, suggesting that the return to collegiality ideal, though difficult, is at least a possibility. The

imagined possibility of a return to the ideal state links to another aspect of the fantasy – enjoyment (*jouissance*) through active transgression of the espoused ideals (Glynos, 2010). The desiring academic subject is complicit in maintaining and strengthening the managerial *status quo* in universities, by repeatedly transgressing the collegiality ideal and submitting to the competitive, hierarchical and atomizing managerial practices and audit regimes (Davies & Petersen, 2005; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Malcolm & Zukas, 2009). As Glynos and Howarth (2007) observe, despite expressed dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the managerialist measures employed by higher education leadership, we have not seen revolts in academia or any action attempting to take matters back into academics' own hands. What we have seen is more academics working more busily on more papers published in a hierarchical set of journals, ideas guarded more fervently, more secrecy and silos, and less engagement with students and institutional processes (Davies & Petersen, 2005; Glynos & Howarth, 2007). By identifying with collegial and rejecting managerialist values academics might, as reported in some other contexts, be resorting to 'humour, the mocking of pompous official rituals and sneering cynicism' (Fleming & Spicer, 2003 p.164 cited in Glynos, 2010 p.30). This helps to sustain academics' 'belief that they are not mere cogs in a company machine, thereby allowing them to indulge in the fantasy that they are 'special' or 'unique' individuals (Fleming & Spicer, 2003 p. 164 cited in Glynos, 2010 p. 30). Contu (2008) describes this as 'decaf resistance' and reveals how such ironical and sceptical defiance offers vital support to the dominant order by hiding the subjects' 'own role in extending the very processes they appear to resist against' (Hoedemaekers, 2008, p. 36 cited in Stavrakakis, 2010, p. 89). Despite the resentment and cynicism, academics are extremely efficient subjects; ensuring that a university is a generally well-functioning organization. Paradoxically, the strengthening grip of the collegiality

fantasy also ensures that the power balance in universities does not change in real terms. Academics' allegiance to the unattainable collegiality ideal situated in binary opposition to management ultimately disguises the contingent character of this relationship and prevents both leaders and academics from imagining alternatives.

A paradox in Lacanian theory is that the commandment to enjoy leads to its opposite (Cederström, 2010, p. xvi). This is apparent with collegiality – when it is imposed upon academics, it becomes its 'Other', and is, again, resisted. This transformation can be observed in the debate that took place in the United States (American Association of University Professors (AAUP), 1999) about whether collegiality should be explicitly named, measured as a performance, and mandated as an essential academic ethical norm. Attempts by university leaders to move towards externally determined, 'objectively' measured or 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990) were met with considerable resistance and critique from the academic community (Ceasar, 2007). It was argued that including a formal collegiality criterion in promotion and tenure decisions had the potential to transform the scholarly culture of candid debate to one of conformity and homogeneity, and in this way, threaten academic freedom (AAUP, 1999; Ceasar, 2007).

The fantasy of collegiality works by remembering through forgetting. It glosses over the inconsistencies in the historical realities of collegial practices, particularly in terms of the role afforded to the 'underclass' of the academy – women, academics from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, and other marginalized groups, excluding the students altogether (Cassidy, 1998; Marginson & Considine, 2000). For instance, far from an idealised harmonious and inclusive view, it has been suggested by some authors that collegial formation underpinned by the idea of high-status equals working towards greater good must by definition be exclusive and elitist (Cassidy, 1998; Petro,

1990). As such it could be seen as having the potential to concentrate power in small groups of individuals governed by insular 'exclusive, nonaccountable and nonobservable' structures (Waters, 1989, p. 969). Our Lacanian analysis reveals how by simplifying the debate to the antagonism between collegiality and managerialism, the fantasy of collegiality makes the contingent nature of the social and structural arrangements in universities, including the 'grievances and alternative ways of structuring workplace practice' (Glynos, 2010 p. 33) less visible for leaders and academics, and in this way solidifies and reproduces the *status quo*, which is undesirable for either.

Working with a fantasy?

Our Lacanian exploration helps illustrate that collegiality is clearly not a singular and self-explanatory concept, value or norm, yet it is often discussed in higher education literature as an absolute – a value that is unproblematic and necessarily good, and as something that all academics should naturally strive towards (see Nixon, 2004; Rowland, 2008). Similarly, where collegiality surfaces in academic leadership literature, it is often discussed in a general sense as a 'good thing', and it is rarely stipulated what is actually meant by collegiality or what it might look like in various institutional or disciplinary contexts (see Scott, et al., 2008). The frustration with complexity, inconsistencies of competing demands, and the general chaos in universities today expresses academics desire for clarity and simplicity in their work (Silver 2003; Smith, 2010) and collegiality in this unproblematic form offers a fantasy of such clarity and simplicity. However, the reality of the turbulent and effervescent waters that universities are navigating today means that both academics and academic leaders have to deal with complexity, diversity, and, inevitably, tensions, as an inherent part of working in a higher education organization. It is not helpful to perpetuate the simplistic 'perception

that [collegiality] is being sacrificed on the altar of a cold-blooded managerialism' (Spiller, 2010, p. 688).

In thinking about the way that leadership might work with notions of collegiality, we have considered the counterintuitive ways that the fantasy of collegiality might be playing out in academics' resistance to managerial practices. If the disenchantment regarding their work experienced by academics is as widespread as is reported in the literature (see Anderson, et al., 2003; Ylijoki, 2005), leaders need to give academics time for grieving and reflection, 'to allow academics to reconnect old purposes with new activities and circumstances' (Taylor, 2008, p. 35). Leaders also need to create opportunities for academics to reflect on the wider changes in society and help them to move away 'from their relatively local concerns in order to adopt a more holistic perspective'. (Taylor, 2008, p. 35).

The Lacanian philosophy and the notions of fantasy, lack, desire, enjoyment and transgression offer a useful lens to explore academic cultures and leadership. We have shown how the tendency to simplify the notion of collegiality might be working against the very intentions of academics yearning for more collegial leadership practices and attitudes in higher education. We do not advocate a radical act of 'total social refoundation' as an alternative to 'decaf resistance' (Stavrakakis, 2010, p. 90), but perhaps real change could be achieved by academics and academic leaders through practicing 'detached attachment' – 'seeing organizations for what they are, seeing how our fantasy structures our work, and recognizing the inevitable distance which we will have from our fantasy of a perfect working life.' (Spicer & Cederström, 2010, p. 163).

From the perspective offered by our exploration, we propose that to traverse the nostalgic fantasy of the collegial past, instead of looking for closure, it might be more

useful to put indeterminacy, absence and lack at the very centre of the academic leadership project.

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