The Relational Dilemma: Exploring interpersonal loyalty

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“I believe Loyalty is **being true** to your family, (coworkers), anything that holds value to you and most importantly (your profession / organization). We are all different and unique in our own ways, therefore, we **will have different views** of loyalty.”

“To be loyal means that you have to make **sacrifices** on occasion, but only if those sacrifices are for a truly good cause, not for someone's ego.”

“Loyalty is **a core value**.”
“Loyalty is simple to define. People make it more difficult than it need be. Simply put, it's caring for others, showing that you are sincere, and helping them in hard times as a (leader).”

“I believe that the word loyalty itself, put simply, is merely the ability to place whom or whatever you are loyal to above yourself. It is the exact opposite of selfishness.”

“Loyalty is a very misunderstood word. Criminals show loyalty to one another. It means a dedication to what one believes in and supports.”
“Loyalty to me, means being reliable, honest, respectful, and trustworthy.”

“Loyalty requires respect, is not self-serving, it invokes dutiful diligence, shows honor, and requires personal courage to do what's right.”

“You have trust to be loyal.”

“Loyalty is directly tied to Integrity.”

“Loyalty goes hand in hand with the commitment to choose the hard right over the easy wrong - it takes personal courage to go against the grain.”

“What’s my take on loyalty: always be dependable.”
Loyalty in the literature

- For as long as records have been kept, the concept of loyalty has been revered as well as loathed, and seen as a basic element of human nature and morality (e.g., Aristotle, trans. 1951; Kant, trans. 1996; Keller, 2007; Royce, 1908)

- Over time, the study of loyalty has been dominated by philosophers (e.g., Fletcher, 1993), marketing scholars (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Reichheld & Teal, 2001) and political theorists (Grodzins, 1956; Guetzkow, 1955; Shklar, 1993).

- For the most part, with a few exceptions, interpersonal loyalty has been neglected by social scientists (e.g. Baxter et al, 1997; Beer & Watson, 2009; Conner, 2007; Moreland et al., 1999, Rusbult et al, 1982; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004)
Loyalty

...Involves devotion to a social entity (e.g., a person, group, or ideal)
...Is hierarchal, ordered
...Is subjective and dynamic
...Is psychologically and socially complex
(multifaceted / multidimensional)
...Has a moral quality to it
...Is related to threat (internal & external)
...Involves conflict and sacrifice

And as far as we know, interpersonal loyalty has rarely been explicitly considered as an empirical variable of interest by psychological researchers who study negotiations and social dilemmas (e.g., VanVugt & Hart, 2004).
The virtue of loyalty

“Virtue is the mean between two vices, one involving excess, the other absence” – Aristotle

In the domain of cooperation, loyalty is the “optimal mean” (i.e., virtue) between selfishness and blind obedience.

Aristotle (trans. 1999); Nussbaum (1995); Grant & Schwartz (2011); Sowden (2013)
But every coin has a head, and a tail...

In a social dilemma there are two competing rationalities:

Dawes (1980); Messick & Brewer (1983); Kahan (1974)
Social Dialectic Theory (Baxter et al., 1997; Baxter and Braithwaite, 2007; Fletcher, 1993)
Interpersonal relationships (e.g., Berscheid, 1994)
Group identity and self categorization (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, et al., 1987)
The Relational Dilemma

Sowden & Kopelman (2013)
Loyalty as a social dilemma

Traditionally social dilemmas involve a choice between being pro-social or pro-self.

In relational dilemmas being pro-social (loyal) toward a social entity (person or group) = being anti-social (betrayal) toward another social entity.
“...It’s ok with all of them pretty much...there’s no one in this platoon that agrees this was wrong...”*

* From Harpers Magazine online, accessed on 10/14/12
Justin Watt

“...These are people that I loved. These are guys that I would take a bullet for. These are guys that have gone back-to-back with me...”
Appropriateness framework

Help us to understand the loyalty / betrayal decision

Rather than being “rational” or “ethical” decision based on:

“What is a person like me (identity) do (rules) in a situation like this (recognition) given this culture (group)?”

Weber, Kopelman, Messick (2004); Kopelman (2008; 2009)
What’s appropriate?

**Situation:** both recognized it as unethical

**Culture:** group (military) emphasizes camaraderie and ethics

**Identity:** as a comrade or as a member of the organization / profession / society

**Rules:** heuristic to “protect comrades” vs. “honor the flag.”
Study 1: Identity (intimacy) and recognition of situation (severity) impact the relational dilemma

- 158 subjects
- Mturk population: age (M-40, SD-13.6); 67% Female; 88% white, 26% single, 36.7% Married; Median income range between $40-65k.
- A two (relationship intimacy) x two (unethical behavior severity) factorial design (Aron et al., 1992; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008)
- A on-line survey (Qualtrics), randomly paired/presented stimuli, using a within subjects design.
- Question: what is the “tipping point” between interpersonal loyalty and ethical integrity? What psychological factors are at play in making the loyalty / betrayal decision?

You have just witnessed Bob, your husband, eat merchandise while shopping at a grocery store and intentionally not pay for it when checking out. A police officer approaches you and asks “do you know anything about this?” You either say yes (ethical / betrayal) or no (unethical / loyal)

Preliminary results: both intimacy and (r=.253, p<.001) severity (r=-.260, p<.260) are strongly correlated with loyalty. Accounting for intimacy and severity improved the accuracy of predicting the loyalty / betrayal decision by 15%.
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Additional implicit (timing), explicit (satisfaction, goodness, difficulty), and individual difference (Trait loyalty, Moral Identity, Moral intuition) Measurements
Study 2: Relational vs. collective (identity) and agreement bias (heuristic) influences loyalty

- 40 subjects
- MBA students: age (M-28, SD-4), 73% Male, 60% US
- A simulated negotiation (one seller / one buyer)
- Scenario: A modified version of the Bullard case
- A two x three factorial design
- Priming one of the three levels of self-concept (Individual, relational, or collective; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Johnson & Lord, 2006; Oyserman & Lee, 2008)

Relational | Collective

I really enjoy being a real estate agent. The satisfaction I feel towards my job comes primarily from the interdependent / team-oriented nature of the work and success I’ve enjoyed in the relationship I have with my business partner/ as a member of a winning team. I have a strong desire to demonstrate that my knowledge, skills, and abilities are in sync with those of my business partner/contribute to the success, cohesion and morale of the entire team.
Questions for you:

Can the relational dilemma (loyalty) be framed as a social dilemma?

Can the study of interpersonal loyalty and the relational dilemma inform the study of social dilemmas and vice versa?
Thank you