Narratives of leadership in academia
A discursive-dialogic analysis

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore how academics with and without formal leadership positions experience and understand themselves as leaders in their everyday working contexts. The thesis both responds to and advances recent criticisms that the majority of leadership studies in higher education tend to exclusively focus on people in formal leadership positions, with an instrumental focus on ‘what works’ as effective leadership. These studies tend to take for granted who counts as a leader, and that knowledge situated in one context can be generalised and applied to another.

I conducted qualitative interviews with 19 academics from diverse backgrounds and positions at a university in Aotearoa New Zealand. Social constructionism, poststructuralism and Bakhtinian concepts were drawn upon to create a discursive-dialogic approach as an analytical framework for my study. This approach enabled me to examine academics’ accounts of leadership in relation to the discursive and dialogic process of identity construction as well as the broader micro-politics of higher education.

From my analysis, I identified three recurrent narratives of leadership prevalent in my participants’ accounts, namely, legitimate leadership, heroic leadership, and effective leadership. I argue that these three dominant narratives shaped how individual academics made sense of, and talked about, leadership in their everyday lives. These narratives were pivotally implicated in how academics constructed their own and others’ identities as particular kinds of leaders. The thesis concludes with implications and recommendations for institutions, academics, and leadership researchers, proposing new ways of conceptualising leadership in higher education.
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This thesis is a result of my journey as a doctoral student and a person whose identities are constantly shifting and becoming. In this journey, there are many people who have supported me in many different ways – I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to them here.

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CHAPTER 1

NARRATIVES OF LEADERSHIP IN ACADEMIA

Introducing the study

Good leaders can do bad things; bad leaders can do good things, and frequently people claiming to be leaders do nothing. (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a, p. 3)

Leadership is one of the most researched and discussed topics in contemporary society; it has multiple journals of its own, countless handbooks and even a number of encyclopaedias (Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, & Taylor, 2011; Bryman & Lilley, 2009). In the context of higher education (HE), leadership is heightened by government reforms in response to the global recessions of the last three decades. These reforms expect higher education institutions (HEIs)\(^1\) to become more financially autonomous, market-driven, and performance-focused (Inman, 2009; Marginson, 2004). The move in this direction has resulted in an increasing demand for academics and institutional managers to exercise and develop leadership in order to ‘survive’ and ‘rise’ above these global conditions (Clark, 1995; Middlehurst, 1997; Middlehurst & Elton, 1992; Ramsden, 1998a). Such a demand has subsequently led to the birth of national organisations\(^2\) and numerous research projects focusing on various aspects of academic leadership.

But leadership is not only present at the policy level; it is also deeply embedded in academics’ everyday lives. This term can be found in job advertisements for academic positions as well as the performance-based evaluation for all academics

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\(^1\) I acknowledge that the term ‘higher education institution’ encompasses different types of institutions including liberal arts colleges, teaching-intensive universities, and research-intensive universities among others. In this thesis, higher education institutions primarily refer to universities that emphasise both teaching and research as their main goals and activities.

\(^2\) See various research projects funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching, and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education in the UK.
nowadays. Recent studies have also shown that leadership has become a key feature of academic work in contemporary universities regardless of the position held (Bolden et al., 2012; Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008a). Despite this embeddedness, the definition of leadership itself appears to be ambiguous, and it remains to be seen whether academics have the same understandings of this term as their institutions.

Among existing studies of leadership in HE, two foci seem to be most prevalent. First, researchers tend to focus on what works, asking questions including *what is effective leadership*, and *how can we develop an effective leader?* (Simkins, 2005). These questions are seemingly embedded in the assumption that knowledge situated in one context can be generalised and replicated in other contexts. The second focus has been associated with formal positions including institutional and departmental headships or managers (Middlehurst, 2008). Within this focus, to be considered a leader, one needs to hold one of these positions within the institution or department. As a result, many individuals and groups in academia – who do not hold any formal positions – may remain overlooked and, to a certain extent, ‘marginalised’ by mainstream leadership researchers.

In this study, I seek to problematise these dominant foci and explore other ways of researching and understanding leadership in HE. I align my work with a number of leadership scholars working with critical lenses across organisational contexts (see Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b; Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003c, 2012; Collinson, 2005; Fairhurst, 2007; Gemmill & Oakley, 1992; Gronn, 2003; Ladkin, 2010; Pfeffer, 1977; Wood, 2005; Yukl, 1999a, 1999b). Alvesson and Sveningsson (2012) argue that there are at least four premises embedded within the majority of leadership studies, which have strongly shaped how leadership is understood in organisations and societies. These premises are ‘leader-centricism’ (an emphasis on the leader and the impact of their leadership); ‘entitism’ (a view of individuals, leaders and followers, as fixed

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3 Only recently has the emphasis of leadership studies expanded to include intellectual/professorial leadership (see Macfarlane, 2011; Macfarlane, 2012; Rayner, Fuller, McEven, & Roberts, 2010) and distributed, collective and informal leadership (see Bolden et al., 2008a; Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2009; Gosling, Bolden, & Petrov, 2009; Kezar, 2000; Kezar & Lester, 2009).
entities with traits, values, skills, and so on): ‘romanticism’ (an understanding of leadership as good and necessary), and ‘objectivism’ (an assumption that leadership can be measured and analysed for its abstract variables). To challenge these taken-for-granted premises, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2012) propose a critical view of leadership as the construction individuals actively make about themselves and their world: informed and shaped by organisational and socio-cultural meanings and perspectives; and embedded within the power and politics in their contexts (pp. 221-222). Applying this critical view in the context of HE means not only exploring how academics construct themselves and their leadership, but also paying greater attention to the institutional, socio-cultural, and political contexts from which they speak.

As a result, this study aims to explore how academics at a university in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) experience and understand their leadership—whatever it means to them—with a particular focus on how institutional, socio-cultural, and political contexts may have shaped their sense-making. It attempts to disrupt taken-for-granted premises about leadership in HE, questioning what we have come to know and accept as ‘reality’. In other words, I explicitly challenge the dominant understandings of leadership that render certain ways of thinking, practising, and ‘becoming’, intelligible within the context of HE. With these aims in mind, I propose the following research questions:

1. How do academics experience and make sense of their leadership in academia?

2. How might institutional, socio-cultural and political contexts where these academics are located have shaped their sense-making about leadership?

3. What are common discursive resources of leadership these academics draw on in their talk, and what might be their constitutive effects at both individual and social levels?

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4 Part of this study has already been published in *Higher Education Research & Development* (see Juntrasook, Nairn, Bond, & Spronken-Smith, 2013, and also see Appendix D for the list of publications from this thesis).

5 I discuss the contemporary context of HE, including in NZ, in Chapter 2.
These research aims and questions guide my methodological practices (see Chapter 4) and analyses of participants’ accounts (see Chapters 5 – 7).

In what follows, I discuss the research contexts of this study, as well as its location within intersectional fields of knowledge. I then describe my positionings (including background, motivation, and assumptions) in relation to this study, especially the choice of my theoretical resources. Following this, I define some conceptual terms employed in my study and conclude this chapter by outlining the structure of this thesis.

**Locating the research contexts**

The term ‘leadership’ in the context of HE is often labelled ‘academic leadership’. Despite the growth of research in this field, this term still remains contested, complex and ill-defined (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). Broadly speaking, there are two overlapping categories predominant in the HE literature: institutional leadership and leadership of academic work.

The first category, associated with institutional and departmental management positions, has become a subject of great scholarly interest⁶. The studies tend to focus on the preferred characteristics or perspectives of institutional and departmental managers, including ‘how to’ management strategies and tips, in order to respond to the changes within and beyond the institution. The second category, which deals with the more traditional work of academics (including teaching, research and service), not only appears less regularly in the literature but is often discussed within the management discourse of ‘effectiveness’⁷. In the latter studies, leadership is perceived as an instrument to support ‘planning’, ‘development’, ‘implementation’ and ‘evaluation’ of academic work in order to...

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⁶ See, for example, Askling & Stensaker (2002); Bergman (1995); Bolton (1996); Clark (1995); Filan & Seagren (2003); Gilley (2003); Lawrence (2006); Middlehurst (1993, 1997, 1999); Middlehurst & Elton (1992); Ramsden (1998b); Rowley & Sherman (1997); Smith (2005, 2007); Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt (2005); and Yelder & Codling (2004).

⁷ See, for example, Ball (2007); Gibbs, Knapper, & Piccinin (2009); Martin, Trigwell, Prosser, & Ramsden (2003); McInnis, Ramsden, & Maconachie (2012); and Ramsden, Prosser, Trigwell, & Martin (2007).
achieve ‘excellent’ performances (Marshall, Adams, Cameron, & Sullivan, 2000). The role of leaders, in line with this understanding, is to lead their academic colleagues to achieve ‘excellent teaching’ or ‘productive research’, which ultimately echoes the focus or purpose of institutional leadership (Ramsden et al., 2007). While positional and instrumental orientations to leadership may be the prevailing discourses in the scholarly literature, individual academics will likely attest that ‘leadership’ may be interpreted in many different ways, as my thesis will show.

In this study, I attempt to shift the focus from ‘leadership of academia’ to ‘leadership in academia. This is because the latter can be applied to a wider range of individual academics from different backgrounds and positions. Moreover, while the existing research on leadership in HE offers considerable insights and valuable contributions to its own field, the majority of these studies are yet to attend to issues of power within institutional and broader contexts (but, for exceptions, see Allan, Gordon, & Iverson, 2006; Blackmore & Sachs, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2006; Gordon, Iverson, & Allan, 2010). Such issues have been largely scrutinised by critical leadership researchers outside HE contexts (see Alvesson, 1996, 2011; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011c; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003b, 2003c, 2012; Carroll & Levy, 2008, 2010; Fairhurst, 2007; Sinclair, 1998). Broadly, these researchers have demonstrated that leadership is always embedded in a field of power relations which shapes how individuals come to think of and practise leadership in their everyday lives (see more discussion in Chapter 2).

By engaging with the context of academia as a space of power relations, I hope to bring something different to the field of leadership in HE. As I stated earlier, this field has traditionally held an instrumental orientation, seeking to determine and generalise the best approach to leadership across different contexts. My study differs by drawing upon knowledge and theoretical resources from the broader field of leadership studies, especially within critical management studies (see Chapter 2). Moreover, I also draw insights from the field of HE studies, particularly research with a focus on academic life and practices. As a result, this study can be viewed as an attempt to bring the wealth of knowledge from broader fields into dialogue with the field of leadership in HE.
Foregrounding the researcher’s ‘baggage’

As research cannot be separated from a researcher, my background, values and beliefs—known and unknown—are necessarily implicated in every process of my inquiry (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007; Taylor, 2001; Usher, 1993; Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997). Scheurich (1995a) calls this ‘baggage’ which researchers consciously and unconsciously bring to their study. Despite the limits of knowing, what follows is my attempt to foreground my ‘baggage’, including a brief account of why I became interested in studying this topic.

I grew up in a Thai family where both of my parents were ‘leaders’ at their work. My father worked as a Deputy Managing Director at a large government agency and my mother worked as a Director at an international HEI. Their positions often required long hours of work and involved a lot of stress that I could not fully appreciate as a child. Perhaps it was because of this background that I was never interested in pursuing positions of leadership, let alone working in a large organisation like them.

Throughout my adolescent and young adult life, I always positioned myself as an outsider who did not belong to the system. When I began my undergraduate study I decided to take up theatre and journalism, believing that cultural work would not require the same kind of responsibilities as those needed in larger organisations. However, my interests shifted toward education and social development, as I ‘accidentally’ became a schoolteacher and had a chance to work with many so-called ‘at-risk’ teenagers both in and out of the school context. This experience inspired me to further my education in counselling psychology and expressive arts therapy, in Thailand and later in Switzerland. After graduation, I worked as an arts therapist with young terminally ill patients at a hospital in South Africa. Although this work was only for one year, it inevitably shaped my deep interest in social justice and transformation.

Upon returning home to Thailand I became involved in a social movement of transformative education, and was invited to take a leading role in the

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8 I also discuss my reflexive practices in Chapter 4.
establishment of a new HEI in Bangkok. Despite my desire to have a different life than my parents, I ended up working as a mid-level ‘leader’ at this institution. At that time, I had to learn about how to lead and manage, and I turned to scholarly and ‘self-help’ books for advice. But I was dissatisfied with these resources. Firstly, they were boring, and secondly, they usually failed to speak to my context, as a ‘young leader’ working in a cultural context where seniority is considered of utmost importance. Alongside this experience, I also started recognising that many of my academic colleagues, especially those who did not hold formal leadership positions, often acted like ‘leaders’ in their work. Conversely, many people who were in formal leadership positions did not necessarily act like ‘leaders’ themselves all of the time. What I did not recognise then was this observation had less to do with these people and their leadership; it was my outlook that ultimately shaped how I perceived them as leaders or not.

Ultimately, my professional experience, along with the results from reviewing the existing literature, motivated me to study HE leadership in a more nuanced and critical way. Initially, I wanted to focus my study on stories of academics from different backgrounds and positions to explore how they perceived themselves as leaders, and how they negotiated their leadership within the institution. Indeed, I wished to give ‘voice’ to those who never had a chance to express themselves in either public or scholarly spaces. This ambition, although still partially important in my present study, changed once I began my doctoral journey.

One particular incident contributed to the major change in direction of my study. I remember the time when I was presenting my research proposal at a national conference in my first year as a doctoral candidate. After my presentation, I asked the audience, most of whom were seasoned academics from different universities and polytechnics in NZ, to share stories about their leadership at work, stories that reflected their beliefs and values of professional life. One of the audience members commented towards the end of session that she thought leadership was ‘bullshit’. She said it did not really mean anything to her and that she believed people simply used it for their own advantage. When I heard her say this, in the heat of the conference presentation, I was angry and unsure how to respond. Fortunately, the time was up and my audience had to depart for the
next session. Despite receiving encouraging feedback from some of the audience members later, the comment stuck with me, and I rehearsed possible answers in my mind for many weeks after. Once I was able to let go of my negative thoughts and emotions, I began to recognise that her comment may offer some insights for my study. If leadership is ‘bullshit’ as she said, why are institutions still expecting it from their staff? Why do many academics not refuse it, but instead take it seriously as part of their identities? Indeed, what makes it possible for them to think and talk about themselves as leaders in academia? These questions completely changed how I viewed my topic and have taken me in a different direction than I had earlier imagined. Instead of taking people’s experiences and understandings at face value, I became more interested in how individual academics construct themselves as leaders, and how these identity constructions are located in the broader contexts of their institution and society. With this in mind, I adopted a social constructionist perspective\(^9\), as one of the major theoretical resources for my study. This perspective is not only relevant to my research focus but also similar to my worldview as a researcher and a human being.

Generally speaking, social constructionism is based on an understanding that what we come to account for in the world is relationally and socially constructed (Gergen, 1985). This resonates with my own worldview, which is deeply rooted in Buddhism. In Buddhist teaching, everything is understood as being in a state of constant change; and meanings are mentally and socially constructed by human beings (Payutto, 1995). A number of scholars have pointed out that, as a core value, Buddhism shares some significant commonalities with social constructionism (Gergen, 2009b; Sinclair, 2007, 2011; Stanley, 2012). Both share a similar understanding that individuals actively construct the meaning of their everyday lives through language, which does not reflect, but constitutes, their reality (Etherington, 2004; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008).

Alongside social constructionism, I also draw on poststructuralist and Bakhtinian scholarships to conceptualise my study, especially my analytical approach. Poststructuralism pays attention to language and its embedded power.

\(^9\) In this study I choose the term “perspective” to indicate the range within any one theoretical corpus.
that constitutes individuals’ ways of thinking and becoming. Bakhtinian conceptions direct a focus to the dialogic tensions within language, especially the coexistence of multiple values and points of view in social contexts. Together, social constructionism, with added layers of poststructuralism and Bakthinian concepts, make it possible for me to undertake critical research that understands leadership as relationally and socially constructed, discursive and dialogic, always incomplete, and always unfinalised (see Chapter 3 for further discussion on theoretical resources).

Overall, these theoretical resources point to the importance of language, and how it constitutes academics’ ways of thinking, practising, and becoming in relation to their leadership in HE. They also enable me to explore leadership as constitutive of both social and individual processes, and especially how these processes are interrelated. Although these theoretical resources do not allow me to claim the findings from my analyses as ‘the truth’, I hope my study will offer insights about leadership in HE that might be applicable for HEIs, academics and leadership researchers in both NZ and elsewhere.

**Defining the conceptual terms**

Despite my intention to discuss the key terms employed in this study in Chapter 3, there are a number of terms that I wish to define here because they have already appeared in this chapter and will also appear in Chapter 2. In writing this thesis, I am aware that these terms evoke competing definitions, depending on readers’ theoretical orientations. While acknowledging that I cannot avoid the possibility of multiple interpretations in the language, the following discussion aims to outline my understandings of these terms—namely, identity, narrative, and discourse.

The first term to be discussed here is ‘identity’. Identity is a complex and contested term, which generally refers to an individual’s identification with a range of social categories (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Throughout this study, I use the term ‘identity’—as inclusive of the ideas of subject and subjectivity—to signify both social and personal aspects of identification. My understanding of
this term sits between Giddens’ (1991) agentic, self-reflexive subjects of late modern society and Rose’s (1996, 1999) self-governing, less voluntaristic subjects of neoliberal regimes. In this light, identity is not fully agentic but not also overly determined by regulating discourses in social contexts. It is always in process of identification and subjectification, and can be explored empirically in individuals’ talk (Taylor, 2011).

Individuals’ identities are continuously (re)constituted by their social locations (Sampson, 1989) and their momentary positions (Davies & Harré, 1990). They are multiple, fragmented, incoherent, contradictory, and never fully completed. Although a number of poststructuralist scholars have debated which of the terms ‘subjectivity’ or ‘identity’ is preferable, many still use the two terms interchangeably. In this study, I prefer to use the term identity rather than subjectivity because it has greater congruence with the conception of narrative identity, which I employ as part of my conceptual approach to analysis in this study (see more discussion in Chapter 3).

The second term I wish to discuss here is ‘narrative’. Following Taylor (2006, p. 95), I use ‘narrative’ as “a construction, in talk, of sequence or consequence”. An example of sequence is the use of expressions such as ‘then’ or ‘later’ while consequence is ‘so’ or ‘therefore’. Both sequence and consequence refer to temporality such as the past or potential ordering of events over time (Taylor, 2006). Following a social constructionist perspective, I consider that a ‘narrative’ does not necessarily require a linear, coherent and complete form; rather, a narrative can be messy, fragmented, incomplete and incoherent (Boje, 1995; Court & Court, 1998; Frank, 2010; Gergen & Gergen, 2010b, 2011). In Chapter 3, I also discuss different meanings of narrative including personal or self-narrative (or ontological narrative in Somers’ (1994) terms), public narrative, and cultural narrative. Throughout this thesis, I tend to use the term ‘narrative’ with specific qualifiers such as ‘personal narrative’ or ‘cultural narrative’, but sometimes I use it without an indicator when referring to it as a property of an individual such as ‘her narrative’, which means ‘personal narrative’.

The final term to be discussed is ‘discourse’. Broadly, discourse analysts view discourse in two different ways: Discourse with a capital-D, and discourse with a
small·d (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b; Bamberg, De Fina, & Schiffrin, 2011; Fairhurst, 2007; Gee, 1991). Discourse with a capital-D, or sometimes called societal discourse, refers to the kind of thought systems, ideologies, or regimes of truth (Foucault, 1972) that shape what individuals take to be true. This understanding of ‘Discourse’ tends to focus on the broader socio-cultural and institutional conditions that make the effects of particular discourses possible (Bamberg et al., 2011). On the other hand, discourse with a small-d, traditionally used by linguists and conversation analysts, refers to the study of talk and text in social practices (Fairhurst, 2007). This understanding of ‘discourse’ tends to focus on the interaction between (at least) two speakers, concerning the language-in-use and interaction process (Bamberg et al., 2011). In this study, I use ‘discourse’ to signify both societal and interactional dimensions. That is, it refers to both regimes of truth embedded within socio-cultural and institutional contexts, but also how it plays out in interactions among individuals (for example, the researcher and participants).

**Structuring the thesis**

This thesis is the result of my journey as a researcher. Although the structure of my thesis suggests a linear process from beginning to end, the process of conducting research and writing this thesis was much messier than it appears in this final product.

In the next chapter, I review the literature centred on leadership within and beyond HE. I explore its contested nature and dominant approaches which have shaped our understanding and practice from past to present. I also consider some criticisms and suggestions offered by critical leadership scholars.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the theoretical resources that have informed my epistemological and methodological practices throughout this study. These theories are social constructionism, poststructuralism and Bakhtinian conceptions, which I draw upon to create a discursive-dialogic approach as a conceptual framework for my study.
The focus in Chapter 4 is the research design and methods underpinning this study. I describe my particular approach to qualitative interviewing and reflexivity. I also detail my methodological practices, including research procedures and ethical considerations.

In Chapters 5 – 7, I present the findings from my study. The focus of Chapter 5 is on the contested meanings of leadership commonly espoused by the academics in my study. I examine how this particular group of academics negotiated these meanings in their talk, and how they took up certain identities of legitimate leaders in academia.

In Chapter 6, I focus on the heroic narrative, one of the most powerful cultural narratives of leadership in contemporary society. I explore different ways in which the academics drew on this cultural narrative to make sense of, and to talk about, their leadership experiences. I go on to examine what might be the constitutive effects of this cultural narrative at both individual and social levels.

The findings in Chapter 7 centre on the narratives of effective leadership in HE. I examine how the academics in my study constructed themselves and others as certain kinds of in/effective leaders in their talk. I also look at what their narratives may tell us about the contested nature of leadership and what we often take for granted as the ‘reality’ of leadership in HE.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I highlight the contributions of my study to various research communities. Along this line, I consider some practical implications as well as recommendations for future research. I conclude this thesis with my personal reflections on the research process.
CHAPTER 2

NARRATIVES OF THE FIELD

Reviewing the literature

The ocean of leadership literature—both general and educational—abounds with models and theories of leadership. Some of these rise to the surface and float on strong currents for years before eventually becoming beached and replaced by other strong swimmers. Others bob briefly above the surface only to sink again as quickly as they appeared. (Simkins, 2005, p. 11)

In this chapter I undertake a critical review of the literature that grounds my study of leadership in academia. My review focuses on dominant narratives of leadership within and beyond HE. It illustrates ways in which these narratives have described and constructed what we have come to think about leadership in general and leadership in HE in particular. These dominant narratives have been constituted by, and often taken for-granted among, HEIs, academics, and leadership researchers as realities of leadership in academia.

I begin this chapter by engaging with the literature that focuses on the current state of HE, examining the prevalence of leadership within the field. Then, I discuss the contested nature of leadership and pay particular attention to five differing approaches that have governed our thinking from past to present. Following this, I focus on critiques of mainstream leadership studies and consider alternative approaches offered by critical leadership scholars, especially the implications for the current study.

It all begins with changes: The state(s) of higher education

Contemporary literature on HE often draws on narratives of dramatic changes, changes that are mostly driven by the global economy in the past three decades.
Common narratives include references to the massification and commercialisation of education, a significant decrease of government funding for public institutions, growing competition among international and local institutions, and an increased concern about excellence, quality, accountability, and performance (Alexander, 2000; Altbach, 1999; Barrow, 1999; Marginson, 2006; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Scott, Coates, & Anderson, 2008; Shore, 2010a; Teichler, 1998; Trow, 1996). Middlehurst (1999, p. 307) predicted over ten years ago that these changes, “the new realities” as she calls them, would impact on institutional cultures and functioning, including government policy, institutional architecture, and academic operations. Ten years later, the new realities are assumed to be the realities as is evident in most, if not all, contemporary literature on HE, especially in Western society.

In tandem with the aforementioned changes, it is argued that neoliberalism has emerged concurrently as the new ideology of regulation, which Turner (2007) calls a revival of classical economic liberalism. The central tenets of neoliberal ideology include assumptions of the individual as self-interested, a commitment to laissez-faire economics, and a valorisation of free trade (Olssen & Peters, 2005). These tenets inform the mechanisms of auditing, accounting and new forms of management in HEIs. Within neoliberal institutional governance, the performance and accountability of individual members is continuously assessed and rewarded in order to ensure that their institution is able to compete in local and global HE ‘markets’. A common narrative of such changes often proclaims that, through organisational restructuring, HEIs around the world have shifted from collegial academies to corporate enterprises (McNay, 1995), or from ‘bureaucratic-professional’ to ‘consumer-managerial’ modes of governance (Barrow, 1999; Olssen & Peters, 2005). While this narrative should be questioned for its assumption that collegial academies were the norm prior to neoliberal reforms, its widespread expression has already created a sense of the nostalgic past vis-à-vis the ugly present in contemporary working environments of HE (Ylijoki, 2005).

If we take HEIs in NZ as an example, universities here have adopted an ‘audit culture’ in which ‘quality assurance’, ‘performance appraisals’, and ‘benchmarking’ are part of their reformed governance (Larner & Le Heron, 2005;
Shore, 2010a). Such reforms have led to fundamental changes including intensification of government control over universities; commercialisation of institutions; and introduction of the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) as a new assessment scheme for government research funding (Shore, 2010a, pp. 21-26). In effect, universities find themselves competing with one another for reputational and financial gains.

The shift of governance modes in HEIs has been portrayed by many scholars as threatening the ‘traditional’ values of HE where intellectual autonomy, academic freedom and collegiality are often held to be very important (see Davies & Bansel, 2005; Davies & Petersen, 2005; Giroux, 2002; Henkel, 1997, 2005; Larner & Le Heron, 2005; Marginson, 1997, 2000; Olssen, 2006; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Shore & Wright, 1999; Vidovich & Currie, 2011). Some critics, however, argue against a simplistic view that neoliberal values have completely replaced the traditional values of HE (Halford & Leonard, 1998; Simkins, 2000). Shore (2010b), in his analysis of HEIs in NZ, contends that the neoliberal mode of governance has only “added a new layer of complexity to the university's already diverse and multifaceted roles in society” (p. 1). In his view, such a layering of different, and often contradictory, policy agendas reflects the complex and richly textured nature of contemporary life in academia (Shore, 2010a, 2010b).

Despite the ongoing debates around how much HEIs have adopted neoliberal values, the mainstream literature addressing HE tends to ignore this issue, and go on to propose a new mode of governance with new concepts, strategies and practices that resembles neoliberal values (Middlehurst, 1999). This literature often emphasises the collective responsibility of administrators and academics to provide the ‘best’ quality of education for students (as customers) in order to serve their future employers (as potential markets), which has become one of the aspirations of modern universities (Burkhalter, 1996; Marginson, 2004; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Shore, 2008). The idea that institutional success will depend on how well its members are equipped for these changes has become a new mantra in many HEIs. This particular idea is now dominant in public narratives (including the scholarly literature and popular media), constituting the ‘realities’ of HE context in which ‘new’ forms of leadership are required.
The call for ‘new’ leadership

Traditionally, leadership in HE has been associated with the heroic image of individual academic achievement (Rowley, 1997). ‘Academic leaders’ are often appointed to institutional or departmental positions of leadership based on their scholarly reputations. In tandem with a traditional ideology of collegial academies\(^\text{10}\), these leaders were expected to adopt a consensus approach to decision-making processes (Middlehurst, 1993; Middlehurst & Elton, 1992). In this light, they were responsible for representing their institution’s or department’s interests and maintaining their colleagues’ autonomy and morale. Such an ideology is considered at odds with the new reforms of HE, as discussed earlier, because it does not fit with a ‘business-like’ model of modern universities (Davies, Hides, & Casey, 2001).

From the early 1980s, the managerial language of leadership was introduced to HE as part of the neoliberal reforms and the “New Public Management” (NPM) movement\(^\text{11}\) in many Western and Asian countries (Hood, 1991, 1995). Within this language, HE leadership is strongly aligned to corporate management, situated within reformed hierarchical institutional structures. In other words, leaders have become managers, or as Deem (2004) puts it, ‘manager-academics’, for their institution or department. Their ‘executive’ roles extend to monitoring academic performance, and overseeing institutional income and expenditure (Deem, 2004). As a result, these leaders are expected to work ‘on’ (rather than ‘with’) their colleagues in order to ensure their institution’s success, which

\(^{10}\) I am aware that the terms ‘traditional’ (and tradition) as well as ‘collegial’ (and collegiality) may evoke a nostalgic representation of the academy. The usage of these terms often takes for granted that there was a unified norm of higher education in the past. As my study will show, these terms are socially constructed depending on the context of the speaker.

\(^{11}\) The movement of “New Public Management” emerged from public dissatisfaction with the way public sector organisations had little or no accountability for expenditure of government funds. Pollitt (2001, p. 474) summarises the key elements of the NPM model as a blurring between the public and private sectors with more specialised and autonomous organisational forms: a use of market-like mechanisms for the delivery of public services with contract or contract-like employment; and an emphasis on outputs and outcomes, performance indicators and standards, efficiency and individualism.
somewhat contradicts the traditional notion of leadership outlined earlier.

The new marriage between leadership and strong ‘executive’ management has sparked heated debates within the scholarly community (Chandler, Barry, & Clark, 2002; Davies & Thomas, 2002; Deem, 2001; Deem & Brehony, 2005). One of the most popular issues focuses on whether a management approach to leadership is suitable, or even ethical, for HE. This issue is often aligned with an illustration of HEIs as distinct from other forms of organisation (see Middlehurst, Goreham, & Woodfield, 2009), hence requiring a unique approach that is more appropriate to its context.

Among the range of ideas advanced, Ramsden’s (1998a) seminal work on HE leadership seems to be the most influential. In his study of HEIs in the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, NZ, and the continent of Asia, he found common characteristics of perceived effective leadership including: leadership in teaching; leadership in research; strategy, vision and networking; collaborative and motivational leadership; fair and efficient management; development and recognition of performance; and interpersonal skills. He argues that academic leaders (or what he calls managers) must be prepared to adopt managerial values alongside traditional academic values in order to secure their institution’s effectiveness in times of rapid change. Despite his purportedly ‘realistic’ take on the changes in HE, Ramsden fails to fully account for the principles of managerialism that underpin his work. I argue that these principles tend to overshadow (rather than serve) the traditional academic values he himself argues for.

Accordingly, I would argue that leadership has become a managerialist device, disguised under the label of ‘effective leadership’, with a strong emphasis on the financial and reputational gains of each leader’s institution. A recent study from the UK, focusing on management practices and perceptions of academics in leadership positions, demonstrated how these individuals have already embraced managerialist principles and adopted its associated language (such as ‘effective’,

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12 This is judged by how often his work ‘Learning to Lead in Higher Education’, compared with other literature on leadership in higher education, is referenced in scholarly literature and popular media.
'customer', 'performance', 'best practice', 'excellence') into their working routines (Deem & Brehony, 2005). This study presents an example of how deep-seated and widespread managerialism is in contemporary HE.

Following the introduction of ‘new’ ideas of leadership in HE near the end of the last century, the volume of studies concerning leadership has increased significantly. The lack of research in the past13, together with demands from institutions and practitioners, have led to numerous projects focused on leadership in HE in the past decade. In what follows, I discuss ways in which research on leadership has usually been undertaken in the context of HE.

**Studying leadership in higher education: The search for ‘Holy Grail’?**

Studies of leadership in HE, at both institutional and departmental levels, tend to focus on two main features. The first is based on the description and analysis of leadership roles, changes in their nature and expectations from stakeholders (including staff, students, policy makers, and future employers), and perceptions of effectiveness by academic leaders and their followers (see Ball, 2007; Bryman, 2007; Bryman & Lilley, 2009; Gibbs et al., 2009; Marshall, Adams, & Cameron, 2001; Martin et al., 2003; Middlehurst, 1993, 1997, 1999; Middlehurst & Elton, 1992; Ramsden, 1998a, 1998b; Ramsden et al., 2007; Smith, 2005, 2007). The second feature, which shares some overlapping content with the aforementioned feature, involves the training and development of leaders in both formal (such as leadership development programmes) and informal (such as everyday and onsite learning) capacities (see Inman, 2009; Johnson & Westwood, 2007; Knight & Trowler, 2001; Marshall et al., 2000; Scott et al., 2008). Both aspects, however, seem to hinge on an assumption that if we find out ‘what works’, we might apply such knowledge across diverse contexts.

Simkins (2005, p. 10) argues that the discourse that effective leadership can be “identified, prescribed and replicated” is problematic. He observes that “what

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13 For instance, focusing on qualitative studies, a review of *The Leadership Quarterly* from 1979-2003 (Bryman, 2004) found only 14 of 78 reports on leadership in higher education.
works” in one context may be inappropriate and unhelpful in another (Simkins, 2005). As a result, he proposes the notion of “making sense of things” which recognises the importance of specific contexts in the study of leadership in educational settings, with a particular focus on “the interaction between structure and agency... and how this is mediated by individuals’ values, personality and personal history” (Simkins, 2005, p. 19). This line of thinking opens up possible ways of looking at the various factors that might be embedded in a particular leadership context. One is to examine an interplay between structural and agentic factors embedded in the everyday lives of academics. The structural factors, for instance, may include national and institutional laws and policies: economic resources; and institutional and departmental cultures (Kekäle, 1998), whilst the agentic factors may include family and childhood backgrounds; educational and professional experiences; gender; age; and ethnicity (Middlehurst, 1993). Recognising these factors does not mean that it is possible for researchers to determine what factors influence the way individuals make sense of their (and others’) leadership. There are still many factors, known and unknown, that may shape an individual's way of thinking and practising leadership in their everyday lives. While I accept this argument, one fundamental question remains unresolved: is there any agreement on what leadership actually entails?

**The contested nature of leadership**

Reviews of leadership studies in HE and other contexts often reveal the contestation of existing knowledge of leadership, especially on its nature, definition, and theory (see Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b; Bryman, 2007; Simkins, 2005; Yukl, 2010). Since the last century, there have been many attempts to map the field and the development of leadership thinking in the hope of finding common ground among scholars and practitioners (see Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Gunter & Ribbins, 2002; Northouse, 2004; Ribbins & Gunter, 2002; Stogdill, 1974). The following summary delineates common results from such attempts:

Indeed, as many writers have remarked, it is ironic that despite attempts to trace the development in leadership thought, a clear definition of the
concept continues to evade us. As has been written almost ad nauseam, there are as many (if not more) definitions of leadership as there are people who have attempted to define it. (Ford, 2005, p. 237)

Despite failures to define and, perhaps, prescribe a general idea of what leadership is or should be\(^\text{14}\), the number of publications on leadership continues to grow within and outside the scholarly community\(^\text{15}\). Theories, concepts, and models have been proposed with attempts to generalise and legitimise the idea(l) of leadership. This large amount of work has led to even more confusing and contested knowledge claims, and often frustration and accusations between scholars (Barker, 1997; Bolden et al., 2011; Goethals & Sorenson, 2006; Rost, 1991).

Part of this contested knowledge of leadership may be attributed to the ways in which scholars and practitioners make sense of what is understood as leadership through their differing perspectives and interests (Fairhurst, 2007, 2008, 2011; Ford, 2005; Yukl, 2010). In HE, for example, leadership can be conceptualised in various forms and levels, including:

- organizational or managerial leadership (exercised through formal leadership positions),
- professional leadership (exercised through upholding professional standards and performing in functional roles),
- intellectual and disciplinary leadership (extending the boundaries of knowledge and conceptual understanding),
- personal leadership (based on credibility, charisma, expertise and other qualities),
- team leadership (developed through collaborative agendas and working practices) and
- political leadership (building coalitions, networks and social capital). (Middlehurst et al., 2009, p. 319)

Regardless of these existing forms and levels, the focus of research into

\(^{14}\) See Goethals and Sorenson (2006) for an example of a recent US-based project that invited interdisciplinary scholars to exchange ideas and search for a ‘general’ theory of leadership. Despite an unsuccessful result, the project itself is historically and intellectually significant because it illustrates a vivid dialogue among scholars who hold differing perspectives in the field of leadership studies.

\(^{15}\) Grint (2000) argued, over ten years ago, that approximately 10 or more articles on leadership are published everyday.
leadership in HE has been predominantly associated with formal headship and administrative positions. Only recently has the focus been expanded to include intellectual leadership associated with professorial positions (see Macfarlane, 2011; Macfarlane, 2012; Macfarlane & Chan, 2012; Rayner et al., 2010), and also the notion of distributed, collective and informal leadership (see Bolden et al., 2012; Bolden et al., 2008a, 2009; Collinson & Collinson, 2009; Gosling et al., 2009). These multiple forms and levels of leadership are not necessarily bounded categories but often morph into each other when individuals make sense of and practise their leadership at different points in time. This reflects not only the contested, but also the socially constructed, nature of leadership that we often take for granted as indicating the ‘reality’ of leadership.

In a broader sense, Grint (2005a, p. 1) argues there are at least four different ways of conceptualising and understanding leadership, including the person or who ‘leaders’ are; the result or what ‘leaders’ achieve; the position or where ‘leaders’ operate; and the process or how ‘leaders’ get things done. Although these four ways of understanding are different in orientation, they are not discrete from one another. As a result, scholars and practitioners often use them interchangeably without acknowledging their differences, which might partly explain the ongoing contestation in the field.

Despite the contested (and confused) nature of leadership, there are shared understandings among leadership scholars about what can be considered the dominant approaches to leadership. These understandings are important because they offer insights into the development of thinking on leadership, especially how each approach (or group of approaches) has been constructed and sustained as a form of public narrative over time. I argue that these dominant approaches (and their narratives) constitute the ways researchers and practitioners come to understand leadership in our everyday contexts, including HE. In the next section, I provide an abridged review of these approaches accompanied by some critiques from within and outside the field of HE leadership studies.
Dominant approaches to leadership: Different ways of thinking

There are at least five overarching approaches\(^\text{16}\) to leadership that emerge from my review of the literature in HE\(^\text{17}\) and general\(^\text{18}\) contexts, which have governed the field of leadership studies from past to present. These approaches are leadership traits; leadership styles and behaviours; situational and contingency leadership; charismatic and transformational leadership; and more recently, post-heroic leadership. In what follows, I discuss these approaches with a particular focus on interrogating their assumptions and limitations. Despite presenting these approaches in a seemingly linear fashion, it is important to note that they coexist as competing public narratives in contemporary organisations and societies.

**Leadership traits**

The notion of leadership traits, originating within the discipline of psychology from the 1930s onwards, is one of the earliest approaches to the study of leadership. This approach is built upon the ‘great man’ theory, which focuses on personal attributes of historical and political figures (such as Napoleon, Churchill, Luther King, Jr., and Gandhi). These leaders are recognised because of their ‘great’ achievements in the past. Contemporary studies on leadership traits tend to focus on ‘high profile’ leaders in organisations (including HEIs), aiming to discover a common set of traits (physical features, capacities, social backgrounds, and characteristics) that make them successful and distinct from other leaders (Bensimon et al., 1989; Middlehurst, 1993).

This approach is premised on assumptions that ‘leaders are born, not made’; that

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\(^\text{16}\) The term ‘approach’ is used interchangeably with ‘theory’ or ‘discourse’ by different scholars.

\(^\text{17}\) See Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum (1989); Bess & Goldman (2001); Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin (2006); and Middlehurst (1993).

\(^\text{18}\) See Alvesson & Spicer (2011b); Armandi, Oppedisano, & Sherman (2003); Bass (1990a); Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, & Taylor (2011); Chemers (2000); Fairhurst (2007); Ford (2005); Greenwood; House & Aditya (1993); Northhouse (2004); Pfeffer (1977); and Yukl (2010).
there are common traits shared among leaders which set them apart from ‘followers’; that these traits remain stable over time; that these traits enable leaders to achieve in all situations; and that if we could identify common traits of these leaders, we might be able to discover a universal set of personal attributes necessary for choosing or evaluating leaders (Bensimon et al., 1989; Middlehurst, 1993). These assumptions have become part of public narratives about leadership over many decades, and remain prevalent in contemporary times despite their decreased popularity within leadership studies since the late 1940s (Bensimon et al., 1989).

One of the major critiques of the leadership traits approach has centred around its unrealistic assumptions, in particular, the search for a universal set of traits that are applicable to all situations and contexts has been widely critiqued (see more discussion in Bolden et al., 2011; Fairhurst, 2007; Grint, 2000, 1997; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; House & Aditya, 1997; Yukl, 2010). Moreover, this approach does not recognise that interpreting an individual’s trait(s) is subject to the eye of the beholder, who is also shaped by the social and cultural factors of their time. Attributing particular trait(s) to an individual should therefore be a process undertaken with caution, if it is to be undertaken at all.

**Leadership behaviours and styles**

Due to the limitations of the leadership traits research, scholars have turned their attention to how leaders act (Ford, 2005). They investigate the *behaviours* of leaders and argue that it is helpful to distinguish and identify differing styles of leading. In general, this brand of research discerns two particular styles of leadership, namely, task-oriented leadership and people-oriented leadership. While the former concentrates on getting tasks accomplished, the latter focuses on concerns for subordinates (House & Aditya, 1997). There are a variety of studies within this group, ranging from attempts to answer questions about which style is most effective in its outcomes, to an examination of the relationships between leadership style and motivation theories, and the notion of participative leadership, with a concern about sharing power with ‘subordinates’ (see more reviews in Bensimon et al., 1989; House & Aditya, 1997; Middlehurst,
Despite diverting attention from leaders' personal attributes (as in the case of leadership traits), the behaviours and styles approach still assumes that there is a universal set of behaviours and styles that are suitable for all situations and contexts, and that if leaders behave in certain ways, they will ultimately achieve effective outcomes. This approach has gained wide interest in the scholarly community since the late 1940s but started to decline around the late 1960s due to their aforementioned limitations (Bensimon et al., 1989). However, this approach is still relatively prevalent and is often displayed in popular media such as self-help books on leadership (Bligh & Meindl, 2005). With a focus on a set of effective behaviours and styles for every leader, this approach has become a part of public narratives in which tips, tricks and ‘quick-fix’ information are felt to be required.

Similar to leadership traits, writers who advance leadership behaviours and styles are criticised due to their assumptions about universal forms of effective leadership. One of the major critiques is this approach does not take into account the contextual factors and situational complexities in which leaders are required to function (Bensimon et al., 1989; Kezar et al., 2006). Because of that, these approaches often lack the nuance required to understand how context may influence leadership and vice versa.

**Contingency and situational leadership**

In response to the critiques of leadership behaviours and styles, scholars have begun to pay greater attention to the context or situation in which leaders act. In general, there are at least two lines of thinking within these contingency and situational approaches: one focuses on leadership behaviour as a dependent variable while seeking to identify how such behaviour is shaped by contextual factors such as position or type of organisation; and another focuses on factors that influence the relationship between leadership behaviours and leadership effectiveness (Ford, 2005). Accordingly, these approaches borrow from leadership styles and go on to determine which style is more effective for a particular
situation (see, for example, Fiedler, 1967).

The contingency and situational approaches seem to operate under the assumption that leadership style depends on contextual factors, including the nature and characteristics of environment, work, and subordinates, and that there is one effective style of leadership suitable for a given situation (Ford, 2005). They also assume that scholars and practitioners can determine what contextual factors are relevant to leadership style and effectiveness, and that they can measure such factors (mostly through research questionnaires and experiments). These assumptions emerged within the scholarly community from the late 1960s and remain dominant in the present day.

To address the limitations of these approaches, a number of scholars question the consistency between different studies, especially with regard to the ways in which contextual factors are recognised and justified (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b; Bensimon et al., 1989). They also point to the ways other important contextual factors are often excluded from analysis such as organisational size or structure (Ford, 2005), and also power and politics within organisations (Fairholm, 2009; Ford, 2005; Hollander & Offermann, 1990). Finally, there is growing dissatisfaction among scholars that these approaches have still not moved far enough from behavioural approaches in their re-emphasis of leaders’ styles as the key factor influencing effective outcomes (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b).

**Charismatic and transformational leadership**

Around the late 1970s, a new way of thinking about leadership emerged with an emphasis on leaders’ management of meaning of their ‘followers’. These approaches combined a focus on the behaviours and the traits of leaders with an interest in the perceptions and attributes of ‘followers’ (Ford, 2005). In other words, leadership effectiveness, according to this view, depends on how a leader influences the way her/his followers make sense of themselves and of their situations. Accordingly, transactional leadership and transformational leadership are two important terms, coined by Burns (1978), and further developed by Bass (1985, 1990b) among other scholars. These terms are often referred to as
contrasting approaches of how leaders lead. The former emphasises an instrumental approach in which beneficial exchanges between leaders and followers occur through rewards and punishments; the latter builds on interpersonal relationships in which leaders attempt to motivate followers to feel committed to organisational values and visions in order to achieve greater outcomes (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b; Middlehurst, 1993). While Burns (1978) views transformational leadership and transactional leadership as opposite ends of a spectrum, Bass (1985, 1990b) views the former as a separate dimension from the latter, supported by an argument that leaders may draw on both forms of leadership in different contexts (Middlehurst, 1993).

Transactional leadership and transformational leadership have also become popular terms used by leadership scholars and practitioners (including in HE), with a notion that the latter is somewhat more ethical and hence preferable to the former. Because of its strong association with humanistic values (vision, altruism), transformational leadership has sometimes been aligned with ‘real’ leadership while transactional leadership is more identified with management because of its relatively strong emphasis on management routines. However, there is a concern about valuing one approach (transformational leadership) over another (transactional leadership) because it disregards how leaders’ visions and values are often interspersed with management routines in everyday contexts (Bolden et al., 2011).

In a similar fashion, during the 1980s, another approach appeared under charismatic leadership, with an emphasis on leaders’ vision, commitment, communication skills, and charismatic personality (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b). The combination of these qualities is believed to be a powerful and almost irresistible influence on the values and norms of followers. Leaders, following this line of thought, ‘seduce’ their followers into embracing changes in their organisation. This emphasis on leaders’ charismatic power, however, has been criticised widely because of its reliance on the figure of the individual leader as well as its tendency to overlook the ‘darker side’ of charisma (Aaltio-Marjosola & Takala, 2000; Bryman, 1993; Calás, 1993; Howell & Avolio, 1992; Jermier, 1993).

Generally, both transformational and charismatic leadership are based on
assumptions that successful outcomes of any organisation, especially during times of change and turbulence, depend on how leaders ‘guide’, ‘motivate’, ‘transform’, and even ‘seduce’ their subordinates to move in the ‘right’ direction. The powerful image of leader as a (super) hero is in effect rejoined with the ‘great man’ idea embedded in the earlier traits approaches (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). What has been frequently neglected in the mainstream literature are the narcissistic tendencies, blind faith inducements, and heroic obsessions associated with the transformational and charismatic leader (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b). Despite the growing number of criticisms, transformational and charismatic leadership continues to prevail in the imaginaries of the scholarly community and public sphere, especially narratives of successful leaders as the crucial factor of organisational success and survival (see, for examples, Bligh & Robinson, 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003; Moynihan, Pandey, & Wright, 2011; Paulsen, Maldonado, Callan, & Ayoko, 2009).

**Post-heroic leadership**

Since the 1990s alternative approaches have arisen in response to transformational and charismatic leadership and the other approaches discussed earlier (Ford, 2005). The focus has shifted from heroic leaders, often associated with senior executives, to more participatory forms introduced under “post transformational” (Storey, 2011), “shared” (Pearce & Conger, 2003), “distributed” (Leithwood & Harris, 2009; Spillane, 2006), and more recently, “hybrid” (Gronn, 2008, 2011) leadership; in short, they are categorised under the rubric of “post-heroic leadership” (Rost, 1991). Within these approaches, leadership is understood as democratised and distributed across an organisation; it can be achieved by giving voice to, encouraging participation from, and working productively with, all organisational members (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003). Such an understanding challenges, often unsuccessfully, the way the public (and the scholarly community) generally talk about leadership, where leaders' traits and behaviours continue to dominate (O'Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler, 2003).

In summary, post-heroic leadership involves downward, upward, and horizontal dynamics of influence within an organisation. It is hence “represented as
dynamic, relational, inclusive, collaborative, and contextually situated” (Bolden et al., 2011, p. 36). Post-heroic leadership is premised on assumptions that distributions of power, influence and control are possible and preferable within an organisation; that organisation members can lead themselves or even their superiors in some instances; and that everyone can become a leader. As a consequence, this approach has become attractive for non-mainstream scholars, opening up new and previously unavailable ways of thinking beyond dominant heroic approaches (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b).

What post-heroic leadership has often failed to recognise, however, is the complex and strong hierarchical structure within many organisations that may prevent all members from exercising their leadership. This model of leadership has also been criticised for its confusion with other organisational concepts (such as shared decision making, teamwork, professionalism and autonomy) and because it often breeds an understanding that leadership is both everywhere and nowhere (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b). A number of scholars argue that post-heroic leadership has manifested more as ideological rhetoric than reality within scholarly communities and organisations (Bolden et al., 2009; Fletcher & Käufer, 2003). Whether such a notion is true or not, post-heroic leadership has already become one of the dominant approaches to leadership which scholars and practitioners have drawn on in recent years (see, for example of the HE context, Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008b; Middlehurst et al., 2009).

In summary, dominant approaches to leadership have become part of public narratives (and vice versa) that enable people to make sense of leadership in their everyday contexts in specific ways. Reviews of leadership studies in HE and elsewhere show evidence of how dominant approaches to leadership coexist and continue to influence the field with no particular approach securing dominance entirely. The continuing influence of these dominant approaches is made possible, I argue, because of the way in which leadership studies have been conducted by mainstream researchers. I discuss this in the next section.
Critiques of mainstream leadership studies

From my review of the literature on leadership in HE and elsewhere, there seem to be a number of significant issues that are yet to be attended to by mainstream leadership researchers. In this section I consider these issues by drawing on the criticisms of other researchers to inform my study (see Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b; Bolden et al., 2011; Collinson, 2005; Conger, 1998; Ford, 2005; Knights & Willmott, 1992; Meindl, 1995; Rost, 1991; Sinclair, 2007; Storey, 2011).

The first and foremost criticism centres on methodological approaches. It focuses on the way in which mainstream leadership studies have deployed quantitative methods (including questionnaires, surveys, and experimentations) which draw on a positivist paradigm (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b; Ford, 2005). Positivist-inspired methodologies aim to develop and verify hypotheses of leadership as if it is an object of scientific study despite the common view that leadership is intrinsically subjective (Bresnen, 1995; Calder, 1977; Meindl, 1995). Meindl (1995, pp. 339-340) remarks on this:

Much sweat and tears have gone into redoubled efforts to remediate leadership studies by disentangling, decoupling, or separating leadership from its origins: objectifying it—cleaning it up, so to speak—so that researchers can better work with it as a scientific construct, independent of its lay meanings.

One could argue that quantitative researchers have failed to recognise the social construction of their own definition and understanding of leadership. In this light, their definition and understanding of what leadership is or should be may not necessarily apply to everyday contexts, nor be taken up by practitioners and lay individuals, no matter how much ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ their studies possess. Because of that, their preferred definitions and understandings of leadership, including the qualities of effective leaders, should still be regarded as partisan and value-laden – which is opposite to the objectivism they claim in their studies.

Another concern about the majority of leadership studies is their embeddedness
within a taken-for-granted narrative that views leadership as mostly a good thing (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a). In spite of no strong and coherent evidence of the relationship between leadership and outcomes, mainstream researchers continue to rehearse a narrative which emphasises the importance of leadership for all organisations, including HEIs (see Inman, 2009; Rowley, 1997). A number of leadership scholars warn us that taking this for granted is dangerous because it tends to overlook the potentially negative side of leadership, the side that is unproductive and even destructive to an organisation and its members (Clements & Washbush, 1999; Conger, 1990; Ford, Harding, & Learmonth, 2008; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Juntrasook et al., 2013).

The majority of leadership studies are also criticised for repeating already existing public narratives: narratives that constitute, and are constituted by, the way we think about leadership. Alvesson and Spicer (2011b) argue that we tend to accept such narratives because they “speak more clearly to our ideological presuppositions” (p. 19). As a result, mainstream leadership studies tend to overlook their tendencies to serve, rather than question, the managerial ideology, which states that benefits for organisations come first. Such an ideology rarely attends to issues such as gender inequalities, institutional racism and organisational politics, which are often circumvented by an assured model of effective leadership (Fletcher, 2004; Ford, 2005, 2006, 2010; Ford et al., 2008; Sinclair, 1998, 2007).

In addition to these critiques, mainstream leadership researchers are criticised for paying lip service to the importance of context in their studies. For these researchers, an awareness and understanding of contextual complexities, including organisational cultures, economic and political environments, institutional policies, and narrative conventions, is not usually considered to be as important as traits, behaviours, and the perspectives of scholars and practitioners. Furthermore, mainstream studies aimed at generalising the definition and understanding of leadership are often unspecific about the broader social and cultural context in which their studies are located. For instance, the majority of dominant approaches to leadership come from the North American context, and tend to celebrate the heroic archetypes of leadership (discussed in
Chapter 6), which may differ from those prevailing in other parts of the world\textsuperscript{19}.

The focus on individual leaders within mainstream studies is also problematised by a growing number of leadership scholars in recent years. Focusing on individual leaders tends to undermine the collective efforts of other members within a complex organisational process where tasks and performances are accomplished in many different ways. The critique addresses the assumption that in any given situation, the leader (often a man) is the only person who has contributed to ‘successful’ outcomes. This assumption ignores the fact that there are many more people, especially women and invisibilised minorities, who were involved in attaining particular outcomes.

In line with the above critique, a growing number of leadership studies have also pointed out that it is almost impossible to find a ‘perfect’ living leader who possesses all the qualities depicted by mainstream studies (Alvesson, 1996). Sveningsson and Larsson (2006) show in their study that individuals’ claims concerning their leadership are often inconsistent with their practices in everyday contexts. In other words, what people say about their leadership seems to be more reflective of their fantasies and their identity construction, rather than a representation of what they achieve.

In sum, the criticisms that I have discussed thus far are important for the field of leadership studies because they problematise what researchers and practitioners tend to take for granted as the reality of leadership. Acknowledging these problems opens up new ways of understanding and studying leadership that might not have been available before. In the next section, I explore critical approaches to leadership proposed by a number of critical scholars as an alternative platform to that offered by mainstream leadership research.

\textsuperscript{19} For example, a study of the UK National Health Service and local government reveals that a ‘heroic’ approach of transformational leadership was not favoured in the UK context (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005).
Critical approaches to leadership: Other ways of studying and understanding leadership

A number of scholars have proposed critical approaches that challenge dominant ways of understanding and studying leadership. Broadly speaking, these scholars work within the field of critical management studies, which encompasses multiple perspectives against foundational thinking about management and organisation (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). They share similarities in their critiques of the way in which the words “leadership” and “leader” have often been taken for granted as somewhat universal, generalisable, and unproblematic. Instead, they view leadership as a social process whereby “the use of the very word “leader” brings into being socially constructed positions” (Ford, 2005, p. 243). Accordingly, the question of whether the ‘leaders’ are effective in their leadership or not is less important than how they make sense of, and identify, themselves as (effective) leaders in their particular context.

Alvesson and his colleagues are pioneers of this critical approach to leadership which takes local, cultural, institutional, historical, and political contexts seriously and recognises individuals’ (including researchers’) assumptions and interpretations (see Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson, 2011; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011c; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2012; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). These scholars argue that critical approaches help researchers to become aware of the multiple meanings and constructions of leadership often neglected in mainstream leadership research. Furthermore, ideally these approaches prompt

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21 Critical management studies is a term used to encompass a wide range of theoretical influences including, but not limited to, social and relational constructionism, poststructuralism, feminism, and critical, queer, and postcolonial theories (see Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007; Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott, 2009; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Kelemen & Rumens, 2008).

22 Although critical management scholars are all over the world, the majority of work I have drawn on in this study come from Scandinavia, the UK, and Australia.
researchers to look for inconsistencies and contradictions in how individuals make sense of their own and others’ leadership, to develop multiple interpretations and re-presentations, and to problematise and re-define what constitutes ‘good’, ‘bad’ or ‘effective’ leadership (Tierney, 1996). Above all, these critical approaches do not seek to finalise the definition or understanding of leadership, but to examine how individuals use, and make sense of, leadership in various ways according to their multiple contexts and realities.

Adopting critical approaches in this study helps me focus on the complexity and contestation of leadership, which has often been overlooked in the literature on HE contexts. Accordingly, I do not attempt to define the nature and meaning of leadership for my participants. Rather, I approach leadership as a social construction that inevitably depends on discursive resources, including discourses and narratives, embedded within the institutional and broader social contexts in which individuals are located (see more discussion in Chapter 3). As a result, the definition is not as important as how academics construct narratives about their (and others’) leadership in certain ways, and what these might tell us about their identities and lives in academia.

So far, I have undertaken a critical analysis of the research literature centred upon dominant narratives of leadership within and beyond the context of HE. I have discussed the contested nature of leadership and provided a critical review of five dominant approaches that have governed our understandings of leadership over time. I have also addressed criticisms towards mainstream studies of leadership and considered critical approaches that have enabled me to study leadership in different ways. In the next chapter, I provide a more detailed discussion of the theoretical resources that have informed my study. I pay particular attention to the interplay between narratives and identities, informed by social constructionism, poststructuralism and Bakhtinian conceptions.
CHAPTER 3

NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

Conceptualising the study

Perhaps one of the most pressing questions is what exactly is it that the language of leadership does not allow us to see. How does it mask important aspects of social reality such as domination, tiredness, exploitation and sorrow? How does it conceal, or at least discourage, us from seeing more subtle forms of influencing process than those that leadership vocabulary encourages (sometimes even disciplines) us to pay attention to. (Spicer & Alvesson, 2011, p. 200)

At the end of the preceding chapter, I discussed critical approaches to leadership originating largely from critical management studies. These approaches enable me to look beyond what is available in the mainstream literature on leadership in HE. Indeed, they help me unmask important aspects of social reality in relation to how my participants made sense of their leadership in academic contexts. In this chapter, I further elaborate on the critical approaches I undertook in my study. Firstly, I outline the theoretical resources that have informed my epistemological and methodological practices throughout this study. In doing so, I draw from social constructionism with added layers from poststructuralism and Bakhtinian concepts. Secondly, I develop a conceptual framework, building on these theoretical underpinnings. This conceptual framework centres on relationships between narratives and relational and social processes of identity construction. I conclude this chapter with the implications of the conceptual framework for my research methodologies and analytical practices.
Introducing social constructionism

Over the last four decades, social constructionism has emerged and become known as a perspective that aligns with postmodern theories (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985, 1994b, 1999; Hacking, 1999; Harré, 1986; Maines, 2000; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Shotter, 1993a). This perspective has gained popularity among scholars across disciplines and continents, and has shaped the way many think about reality, truth, and research. Indeed, social constructionism offers itself as an alternative to the mainstream paradigm of positivism, a paradigm that predominates in academia, especially in the sciences and mainstream social sciences.

In a broad sense, social constructionism attempts to identify taken-for-granted realities constituted by and through human interactions within social and historical contexts. Arguably, this perspective was introduced by Berger and Luckmann’s The Social Construction of Reality (1966), taken up and developed further by scholars across disciplines, especially in social psychology (see, for example, Billig, 1987; Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1994a, 1999, 2009a, 2009b; Harré, 1986, 1995; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Shotter, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, 2006). Gergen (1994b)—a social psychologist and a promoter of social constructionism—rejects the dominant claim from mainstream psychology and broader social science that positivistic scientific methods can uncover the social reality and, ultimately, produce objective knowledge. He argues that what we come to describe, explain or account for in the world is socially constructed (Gergen, 1985). In other words, the language we use does not mirror reality but constructs it within and through social processes.

The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people...[This form of understanding] is sustained across time...[dependent on] the vicissitudes of social processes...[and] critical significance in social life. (Gergen, 1985, pp. 266-268)
Despite strong dissent, especially from scholars of mainstream traditions\(^{23}\), a social constructionist perspective has gradually spread across the disciplines (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). As mentioned earlier, one of the common characteristics of social constructionism is its emphasis on the role of language within social interaction and sense-making processes (Shotter, 1993a). This understanding of language has opened up new ways of thinking and researching social phenomena, including leadership.

In their review of leadership studies, Fairhurst and Grant (2010) identify two common characteristics shared among leadership scholars working from a social constructionist perspective. First, social constructionist scholars reject a leader-centric approach, inherent within theories of leadership traits, behaviours and styles. Instead, they seek to understand evaluative and sense-making processes of social actors involved in a leadership situation. Second, social constructionist scholars pay particular attention to co-constructed realities in the contexts, processes, and outcomes of social interaction where leadership is discussed and practised. In this sense, they understand that what counts as 'good' or 'appropriate' leadership is interpreted and therefore contestable (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Grint, 2010).

For this study, I have adopted social constructionism as my theoretical resource. Grounded in this perspective, I also draw on key concepts from poststructuralism and Bakhtinian scholarship, which altogether enable me to examine leadership as socially constructed, discursive, and dialogic. In the next section, I elaborate on poststructuralist conceptions of language, discourse, power, and the subject, and illustrate these with examples of how they have been employed in recent leadership studies.

\(^{23}\) These traditions mainly include empiricists, realists, positivists and post-positivists, among others.
Thinking through poststructuralism

To understand poststructuralism is to first look at what it positions itself against or attempts to move beyond. Structuralism was a predominant intellectual movement in social theory during a period following the 1950s and early 1960s (Jones, 2009). In sum, structuralism views language as a tool for expressing meanings originating from an abstract system of signs and symbols (Maybin, 2001), and seeks to explain social experience through objective, positivistic, and scientific forms of analysis (Pettit, 1977). From this foundation, structuralism is confident that all aspects of social life can be explained through a structural relationship in which “things are in relation to other things” (Jones, 2009, p. 83, original emphasis).

Additionally, structuralism rejects the notion of individual agency embedded in a humanist perspective and instead argues for a shift of focus to “social, linguistic and cultural structures as the determinant elements in the explanation of social phenomena” (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984, p. 95). In other words, what individuals think or how they behave is always shaped by external social structures; they are pre-determined by their involuntary membership of particular social categories (such as race, sexuality, gender, class). As a result, the way people think, talk and enact leadership is based on the social category they belong to. Following this perspective, for example, Asian women from lower class backgrounds should understand and practise leadership differently to white men from upper class backgrounds. If this was true, however, how should we account for differences, conflicts and exceptions within the categories themselves?

24 The term ‘poststructuralism’ was originally coined and used in Anglo-American commentaries to describe a movement, or a group of theories, against structuralism. Ironically, when this term migrated from North America to France, it stirred up bemusement and rejection from French philosophers themselves because of its tendency to unify different theories and understandings under the same term (Jones, 2009).

25 Structuralism was influenced by a group of French scholars including Saussure (2006), Althusser (1969), Lévi-Strauss (1978, 1987), and Barthes (1974, 1982).
Language

During the 1960s and 1970s, a group of French philosophers26 became disillusioned with the grand narrative of structuralism (Delanty, 1997). They criticised its objectivist/essentialist approaches to normative and structural explanations of social life (Henriques et al., 1984). These scholars' critical movement “was precisely to question the privileging of language [as is often the case for structuralism] and to question the notion that the best way to understand everything was to reduce it to sign-systems” (Spivak, 1996, p. 302, original emphasis). Within this movement, language does not mirror social reality but constructs it. Therefore, any interpretation of social reality can only be regarded as temporary and dependent on the shared understanding in the particular context within which it is situated (Weedon, 1997).

Central to the poststructuralist movement are concerns with how language constitutes social relations (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a). This is known as the ‘linguistic turn’ in the humanities and social sciences. From a poststructuralist perspective, “language has been used to construct binaries, hierarchies, categories, tables, grids, and complex classification schemes that are said to reflect an innate, intrinsic order in the world” (St.Pierre, 2000, p. 480). This taken-for-granted use of language has not only limited our thinking, but also our be(com)ing and relating with others in the world. Scholars working with a poststructuralist lens are less interested in asking questions about the meaning of language, but more about: “How do meanings change? How have some meanings emerged as normative and others have been eclipsed or disappeared? What do these processes reveal about how power is constituted and operates?” (Scott, 1988, p. 35).

Discourse

In attempts to investigate the constitutive process of language, poststructuralist scholars often draw on the concept of discourse, developed by Foucault, among

Throughout his academic career, Foucault studied discourses, including discourses of mental illness (1965), delinquency (1979), and sexuality (1978), inquiring into how they have been socially and historically produced, sustained, and transformed over time. Foucault theorised the concept of discourse as a material practice and a form of knowledge which enables and constrains us to think and act in certain ways (McNay, 1992; St.Pierre, 2000). Considered from a poststructuralist viewpoint, discourse is “[m]ore than just a group of statements…[but] a constellation of related statements [including terms, categories, tropes, and beliefs] that reflect and reproduce particular points of view” (Allan et al., 2006, p. 46). Each discourse constitutes an intelligible way of thinking about social reality—a certain way of being in the world. At the same time, it also undermines and marginalises other ways of thinking, making them unintelligible.

However, Foucault warns us that:

To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies...

(D)iscourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power: it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders its fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault, 1978, p. 101)

Scholars working with a poststructuralist lens often use discourse as a conceptual tool to analyse the constitutive production of knowledge, or certain ways of thinking and being in the world. In this process, they foreground the taken-for-granted assumptions often viewed as ‘truth’ within a particular social and historical context (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b). Bové (1990, p. 54) points to a series of questions that scholars can ask through this analytic process: “How does discourse function? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its social effects? These questions enable us to investigate not only dominant discourses and their social processes, but also resistances and other possibilities for thinking, practising and be(com)ing in the world.
For example, in her study of leadership in the UK public sector, Ford (2006) identifies a number of dominant discourses that managers draw on to construct their leadership identities. She argues that discourses of modernisation have become part of modern workplace identities, and that other competing discourses (including macho-management, post-heroic leadership, professional career, and social and family discourses) have provided discursive resources for these managers to make sense of their leadership identities at work.

In another study of co-principal shared leadership in NZ, Court (2004) illustrates how competing discourses (including New Public Management, collaborative leadership, and cultural feminist discourses) were shaping, and being shaped by, the two participating co-principals and their shared leadership practices. She argues that these co-principals had to negotiate multiple and contradictory discourses in order to make sense of their leadership situations, which often yielded identity conflicts.

I use discourses interchangeably with cultural narratives27, as discursive resources for my study. I argue that the often taken-for-granted discourses of leadership function in particular social and historical contexts, including HE, as material practices and forms of knowledge. These practices and knowledges constitute intelligible and legitimate ways for academics to think, talk and enact leadership in their everyday lives. Discursive resources, in Foucauldian terms, are both an instrument and an effect of power, and yet they can also generate resources for resistance (Foucault, 1978). This notion is developed further below through the conception of power.

**Power**

Central to the conception of discourse is power relations. Traditionally, on a micro level, power is conceived of as something residing in humans, as an individual’s possession. This humanist perspective of power draws on a concept of agency in which human beings are assumed to be fundamentally free to think and behave as they would like, but are corrupted and obstructed by society.

27 I will discuss this term more fully later in this chapter.
In contrast, at a macro level, power is conceived as institutional and characterised by structural control. This structuralist perspective, often expressed in Marxism or liberal feminism, constructs power as negative and oppressive, marginalising structurally oppressed groups of people who need to be ‘empowered’ in order to resist those forces (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). Both conceptualisations of power are criticised by poststructuralists for ignoring the complexity, contestation and fragmentation of social reality.

In reconceptualising power, Foucault (1978) argues that power neither is an individual’s possession nor is it necessarily negative and oppressive. Rather, “[p]ower is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). He also asserts that “power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit” (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). In other words, power exists in contingent relations. It operates in more pervasive and subtle ways in constituting a particular form of knowledge, and yet that very form of knowledge also constitutes power and brings into existence the realities it describes (Braynion, 2004; Weedon, 1997).

Following this line of thought, Foucault encourages us to look at power as not only negative/oppressive, but also positive/generative (Foucault, 1979). In this way, power “enables certain possibilities to become actualities in a way that excludes other possibilities” (Adler et al., 2007, p. 129). Moreover, with the exercise of power comes the possibility of resistance, as Foucault points out:

> [I]n power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all. (Foucault, 1997, p. 292)

His politics of possibility offers us a new way of thinking about, and theorising, how individuals can take up competing discourses and narratives (as discursive resources), through the exercise of power and resistance, to (re)constitute their
(version of) realities as well as their identities and subjectivities (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). This way of understanding opens up a new space for investigating not only dominant discursive resources but also other competing discourses and narratives available to individuals that enable them to exercise power and provide opportunities for resistance.

For example, in the study of women administrators (Deans and Associates) at an American university, Isaac and her colleagues point out that these women took up multiple discourses to (re)construct and negotiate leadership identities within their working contexts (Isaac, 2011; Isaac, Behar-Horenstein, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2009). The authors assert that each working context has its own established forms of power/knowledge, which constitute the particular discourses of ‘appropriate’ leadership. They argue that these women, despite the limits of the discourses available to them, were still able to negotiate their fluid, ongoing leadership identities and new possibilities.

In a critical review, Collinson (2005) contends that the majority of leadership studies, even critical approaches, tend to concentrate on leaders’ power in terms of their control and seduction in a somewhat deterministic way that ultimately undermines and overlooks followers’ resistance. He argues instead that leadership scholars can gain new insights by focusing on how leaders exercise multiple (economic, political and ideological) forms of power through differing strategies such as monitoring work, producing institutional visions, and re-engineering structures. Different forms of power provide different opportunities for resistance for their followers (Foucault, 1978), such as distancing, dismissing organisational visions, and/or enabling/restricting outputs.

In my study, I understand power as exercised through how we engage with certain narratives and discourses of leadership as realities, which in effect work to enable and constrain us to think, talk and enact leadership in certain ways. However, these discursive resources of leadership, embedded in a matrix of power relations, are always open to resistance as individual academics can draw upon a range of discursive resources to make sense of their leadership. This process is related to the ways in which individuals are made subjects, which I discuss next.
The subject

From a poststructuralist perspective, the subject is not “a conscious, stable, unified, rational, coherent, knowing, autonomous, and ahistoric individual” (St.Pierre, 2000, p. 500) as typically conceived in humanism. The subject is not “a product of society who is deeply embedded in social relations” (St.Pierre, 2000, p. 501) as argued by Marxism. The subject is not living “with an unconscious that is almost always simply unavailable, not present, and uncontrollable” (St.Pierre, 2000, p. 501) as often theorised in Freudian psychoanalysis. To refuse these notions does not mean poststructuralism renounces the existence of the subject altogether. Rather, it aims to problematise and deconstruct the subject (Davies, 1997) or, as Foucault asserts, to make sense of “how human beings are made subjects” (1983, p. 208).

Poststructuralism conceptualises how human beings are made subjects through the processes of discursive subjectification (Davies & Gannon, 2005). In these processes, individuals are subjected to the constitutive meanings and assumptions of particular discursive resources, which enable them to think, talk, and act accordingly (Henriques et al., 1984; Weedon, 1997). From this particular point of view, subjects are embedded within complementary and contradictory discursive systems. Their agency is neither unified nor autonomous, but rather ‘created through situations and statuses conferred on them’ (Scott, 1992, p. 34). Weedon elaborates on this further:

Although the subject in poststructuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also a subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available. (Weedon, 1997, p. 121)

Following this line of thought, subjects are always in the process of constituting themselves and being constituted within a network of competing discursive resources at any one point in time. They are never totally free from discursive networks, but are not solely determined by the discourses and narratives in
which they are located (Davies, 2000). Their identities are continuously (re)constituted by their social locations (Sampson, 1989) and changing positions across time (Davies & Harré, 1990). They are fragmented, multiple, contradictory, contextual, never fully coherent, and never fully completed.

For example, an Australian study of teachers’ careers, leadership and gender equity in physical education (PE) shows that dominant discourses of gendered patterns (masculine and feminine stereotypes) still continue to constitute identities and subjectivities of both men and women PE teachers with leadership roles (Webb & Macdonald, 2007). This study concurs with the majority of literature on women in PE, which often points to gender inequities in leadership in this particular field. On the one hand, the authors argue that there was no significant gendered difference in leadership behaviours, which contradicts dualistic ways of thinking about PE teachers’ work, career and leadership. On the other hand, they also point out that only women PE teachers were conscious about gendered expectations in relation to their leadership roles. Women teachers described how their gender was often at odds with discourses of masculine leadership (often assumed to be individualistic, strong, powerful, competitive, and rational), which constituted them as unqualified leaders; however, some of them were able to resist these gendered expectations by positioning themselves otherwise (such as being fit and strong). The authors concluded that a poststructuralist lens enabled them to unravel the “negotiation among discourses and subject positions as social practices that are both determined and determining” (Webb & Macdonald, 2007, p. 506).

For my study, I understand academics as subjects who are embedded within complementary and contradictory discursive systems. In telling their personal narratives of leadership, these academics actively draw on competing discourses and narratives to construct a range of subject positions in relation to their leadership. Within these processes, their leadership identities are continuously (re)constructed according to what they perceive as intelligible within their specific social, cultural and historical contexts, and also in relation to me, as their audience, in the context of the interview.

Poststructuralist conceptions of the subject, language, discourse and power
enable me to explore competing discursive resources of leadership in HE, which are often taken-for-granted as the reality in both public and scholarly literature. This understanding prompts me to examine contested narratives and discourses of leadership espoused by individual academics in my study. It also focuses on the constitutive effects of these discursive resources, especially how they produce a range of subject positions for academics to take up as part of their leadership identities.

What remains unanswered, however, is what happens when these individuals draw on competing, and often contradictory, discursive resources simultaneously? And, more importantly, what might be the co-constitutive effects between contradictory resources in constructing individuals’ identities? In answering these questions, I argue that focusing on relationships between competing discursive resources is crucial because it helps us to recognise the discursive-dialogic nature of how individuals construct their leadership identities in their talk. This focus enables me to examine academics’ identities as not only multiple and contradictory, but also dialogic and emerging.

With this notion in mind, in the next section I turn to Bakhtinian scholarship, focusing particularly on his dialogic philosophy through the conceptions of centripetal and centrifugal forces, and heteroglossia. I argue that this scholarship is pivotal in foregrounding dialogical relationships between discursive resources and subject positions, and also in any attempt to understand their constitutive effects on individuals’ identities.

**Dialoguing with Bakhtin**

It is not an exaggeration to say that Bakhtin’s work has informed and inspired many contemporary scholars, especially those interested in issues of voice, dialogue, representation, and the ideological nature of language and communication (see reviews from Belova, King, & Sliwa, 2008; Frank, 2005; Gardiner & Bell, 1998; Hermans, 2002). Although his original work was placed
within the field of literary studies, its contribution stretches beyond disciplinary boundaries. His work, often regarded as a form of social criticism during the Stalinist regime, scrutinises authoritarian language in its monopoly of meanings. Bakhtin’s analysis, based on his dialogic philosophy, expanded its focus from authors of novels to social institutions in the public sphere.

Gardiner and Bell (1998) point out that one of the many reasons that Bakhtin’s work has attracted contemporary scholars is his non-traditional view of language. Regarded as one of the pioneers of the linguistic turn (outside France), Bakhtin views language as intrinsically social, ideological, contextual, and a site of social struggle over meaning (Maybin, 2001). In other words, he argues that no individual or group can determine the meaning of any words or texts; every usage of language stems from individuals’ biographical backgrounds and their social, cultural and political contexts, which both supplement and contradict one another.

In this light, Bakhtin emphasises that in order for the meaning of language to come alive, every concrete utterance must have the potential to be answered or responded to by addressee(s), either directly or indirectly, in the present or over time:

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28 However, there is evidence that Bakhtin preferred to call himself a philosopher instead of a literary critic (Baxter, 2007).

29 I should note here that my understandings of Bakhtin’s work are based solely on translations and applications of it in other scholars’ work. Because of the complex and fragmented nature of his work (based on the available translations of his original texts from Slavic to English), and the “cryptic and highly allusive style” of his writing (Gardiner & Bell, 1998, p. 3), his work has been interpreted in different ways, which has provoked debates among scholars searching for more accurate interpretations (see, for example, Letiche, 2010; McCarthy, Sullivan, & Wright, 2006; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008).

30 As discussed earlier, the traditional view of language has been influenced by Saussurean structural linguistics in which language is understood as a decontextualised system of signs (Maybin, 2001).

31 Concrete utterance (written and oral), for Bakhtin (1986a), belongs to multiple domains of human activity and communication, written and oral, formal and informal. Holquist (1986) points out here that Bakhtin differs from other structuralists (such as Saussure) because he did not study language as a general system separate from context as a particular performance; rather the unit of study, for him, is the utterance which is embedded in a responsive act between addressees in a specific time and place.
When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee’s perception of my speech: the extent to which he [sic] is familiar with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the given cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies—because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance. (Bakhtin, 1986a, pp. 95-96)

By applying this understanding to my study, I am better able to recognise the complexity and contingency of language used by academics, and myself, during the research interview. Our language, every word and utterance, does not belong to ourselves or any particular group but derives from our interactions with other people, media, society—what we have read, learned, heard, and dreamed in our everyday lives, in the past and the present. As a result, when academics talk about their leadership within the immediate context of the research interview, their biographical background and social, cultural and political situatedness always comes into play. This understanding is best summarised in Bakhtin’s own words:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1986b, p. 170, original emphasis)

**Centripetal forces versus Centrifugal forces**

Following his dialogic notion of language, Bakhtin argues that there are always tensions between two opposing forces—centripetal and centrifugal—that coexist in every interpretation of social reality (Bakhtin, 1984). For Bakhtin, centripetal forces generate centralised, unified and dominant discourses of truth, dogma or status quo which are voiced by, and passed between, authoritative figures such as parents, teachers, scholars and institutions, while centrifugal forces sustain diversity, separateness and open-endedness of meanings, varied across different collectives, professions, sub-cultures, and periods of time (Bakhtin, 1984). More
importantly, he also emphasises the dialogic dynamic between centripetal and centrifugal forces in every concrete utterance of a speaking subject:

The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance: the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia [many discourses/meanings] as well: it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity...Every utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces). (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272)

In this light, as I discussed in Chapter 2, the competing approaches of leadership within and beyond the HE context may best exemplify the tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal forces are the dominant narratives and discourses within particular social and historical contexts that tend to monopolise the meaning of leadership in the public sphere (such as What is leadership? Who is entitled to it? What does effective leadership look like?). Such dominant narratives and discourses limit and determine what can be thought of, talked about, or enacted in terms of leadership in academia. However, when people are engaged in a dialogue about their leadership with one another or with themselves, they actively draw on multiple dominant and alternative resources that are available to them in their social, historical and immediate contexts. Bakhtin calls this notion of multiplicity of discursive resources – ‘heteroglossia’.

**Heteroglossia**

The conception of ‘heteroglossia’ refers to a plurality of discursive resources associated with multiple meanings. Following this line of thought, differing discourses and narratives always coexist and represent socio-ideological contradictions within and between groups, in the past and the present:

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32 Although Bakhtin uses the term ‘language’ in this conception, I prefer the term ‘discursive resource’ in concert with poststructuralism, which emphasises certain constituted ways of thinking, doing and being in the world.
[All] languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and values. As such they may all be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 291-292)

From this notion, differing discursive resources do not only coexist in any given moment, but also interrelate with one another in a dialogical way. This understanding complements the poststructuralist notion that “[w]e are constituted through multiple discourses [and narratives] at any one point in time” (Davies, 2000, p. 62). That is, the conception of heteroglossia, along with centripetal and centrifugal forces, enables us to centre our attention not only on the coexistence of multiple discursive resources (in many different forms) but also on how these resources are dialogically interrelated and how we might gain new insights from such relationships.

Sullivan and McCarthy (2008), following Bakhtin’s line of thought, emphasise that individual voice (or self-narrative) should never be understood as expressing a relatively stable identity; rather each voice should be taken as consisting of a plurality of ‘sounds’ (or discursive resources)33. Gergen and Gergen advance this further:

The polyvocal person is a polyglot, harboring a multiplicity of unrelated and often contradictory potentials. If we press the case, we might say that for every value we espouse, we also have the potential to champion antagonistic values. (Gergen & Gergen, 2010a, p. 266)

Applying this understanding to my study allows me to examine the meaning of leadership as dialogic and unfinalised. It also provides a focus on dialogical relationships between multiple discursive resources in many different forms. As Bakhtin (1981) insists, dominant, hegemonic, centripetal resources are always in

33 Sullivan and McCarthy (2008) use the term ‘sound’ in their writing, which I interpret as discursive resource, similar to Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia.
tension with alternative, marginalised, centrifugal resources, unifying and diversifying in continual dialogue and struggle with one another. These relationships are important because they provide new insights into academics' identities, seeing them as dialogically constituted at the intersections of multiple discursive resources. As a result, it facilitates a broader comprehension of identities as dialogical processes of discursive construction, which might not be available when examining each discourse or narrative separately.

Altogether, my understandings of social constructionism, with added layers of poststructuralist and Bakhtinian scholarships, provide theoretical resources that shape the way in which I conceptualise my study: how narratives are related to the process of identity construction. I argue that focusing on the interplay between narrative and identity enables me to explore the notion of leadership in academia as both social and individual processes and, more importantly, how these processes are interrelated. In what follows, I discuss the conception of narrative vis-à-vis identity, building on the theoretical resources I have presented so far. I then conceptualise three interdependent ways in which narratives are related to the process of identity construction, generating the conceptual framework for my analytical practices.

**Conceptualising narrative (and) identity**

During the past 30 years, there have been an increasing number of studies in the social sciences that deploy narrative as a method of data collection, a tool for methodological analysis, and a mode of representation. Scholars who work within this ‘narrative turn’ have broadly come to agree that we live and make sense of our lives through stories, and our identities are narratively constructed. Narrative, in this sense, is an ontological condition of social life:

It is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities…that all of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making. (Somers, 1994, p. 606, original emphasis)

Despite the notion that identities are narratively constructed, scholars may still find themselves disagreeing about the nature of narratives, how they are related to identities, and how they should be studied (Smith & Sparkes, 2006, 2008). Recent overviews of narrative studies suggest scholars approach the conceptions of narrative and identity differently, depending on their theoretical orientations and foci (Bamberg, 2004; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2006, 2008). For example, scholars may view narrative identities through a (neo)realist perspective wherein narratives have the capacity to represent unique, coherent, authentic, and trustworthy experiences of our selves in the world (Bochner, 2001; Crossley, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988). On the contrary, social constructionist scholars often view narrative identities as multiple, fragmented, discursive, emerging, incomplete, performative, and contextual (Gergen, 1991; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Sparkes & Smith, 2008). These contrasting views have also sparked ongoing debates across continents and disciplines in recent years, particularly over the issues of voice, authority and representation (see Atkinson, 1997; Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Bochner, 2001; Bochner & Ellis, 1999; Crossley, 2000; Richardson, 1997).

In my study, I have adopted a social constructionist perspective, with poststructuralist and Bakhtinian emphases, in conceptualising narrative identities. From a social constructionist lens, self (or personal) narratives are always relational and social (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1994b; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000), that is, in order to make sense of our lives, we need to construct our self-narratives in relation to certain addressees or interlocutors (Bakhtin, 1986a; Harré, 1990), which can be physically present or imagined. In this light, we are obliged to represent ourselves, through narrative accounts, in certain ways that

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35 Gergen (2001) calls these absent or imagined others ‘social ghosts’.
are recognisable, intelligible and socially sanctioned to our interlocutors (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1994b). Moreover, our narratives are not representations of private experience or social reality but rather “forms of social action...produced and circulated in ‘social contexts’...based on socially shared conventions” (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 169, original emphasis).

The social dimension of narrative is important for two reasons. First, it emphasises that in constructing self-narratives we are also situated within broader socio-cultural and historical contexts beyond the immediate situation. In this light, our narrative identities rely on socially shared conventions, or discursive resources in poststructuralist terms, which both enable and constrain us in constructing our identities in certain ways, and not others. Second, the notion of narrative as a form of ‘social action’ points to an active aspect of narrative in terms of what it intends to accomplish (such as explain, deny, or justify) in social processes (Atkinson, 1997). Viewed this way, our narratives are always contingent because they are constructed for telling with a “valued endpoint” embedded within them (Gergen, 1994b, p. 190). For example, some academics may construct their narratives of leadership by drawing on heroic masculine discourses in order to justify their ‘perceived’ competitive and forceful behaviours at work. For others, they may draw on post-heroic leadership discourses in order to signal their beliefs in egalitarian principles or to avoid taking sole responsibility for departmental downfalls.

Despite the relational and social dimensions within social constructionism, there remains the question of how identities are narratively constructed. Building on poststructuralist and Bakhtinian understandings, I conceptualise narrative (and) identity in three interdependent ways. I am aware that there are other ways of conceptualising narrative identities but they are beyond the focus of my study. In what follows, I elaborate on three conceptualisations including narratives as discursive resources, narratives as ongoing constructions of identities, and narratives as dialogical relations.

36 See Smith and Sparkes’ (2008) typology of five contrasting perspectives of narrative identities conceptualised within scholarly literature.
Narratives as discursive resources

From a poststructuralist perspective, narratives—often used interchangeably with the term discourse—are part of the discursive resources available in any given context. In this way, narrative is situated within a matrix of power relations, which constitutes its (un)intelligibility in a specific context. As a result, a narrative that is considered appropriate, legitimate or intelligible in one context might not be considered so in another. Throughout my study, I refer to narratives that are widely recognised in the public sphere as dominant discourses/narratives, or public and/or cultural narratives in Somer's (1994) terms. These terms are also relatively similar to Bruner's (1991) ‘canonical narratives’, Mishler’s (1999) ‘master narratives’, Søndergaard’s (2002) ‘storylines’ and Taylor’s (2010) ‘established narratives’.

In Somers’ (1994) terms, public narratives are “those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand, micro- or macro-stories...[with] drama, plot, explanation, and selective criteria” (p. 619). As I mentioned earlier, dominant narratives of leadership (discussed in chapter 2) are examples of these public narratives. For example, the narrative of leadership traits often consists of stories, tropes and images of ‘The Great Man’. These are people who were born to lead. They share common traits and personalities, which enable them to achieve in all situations and that also set them apart from their ‘followers’. This narrative remains one of the most common ways in which we think about leadership, which is evident in the academics’ accounts in my study.

In addition to public narratives, Somers (1994) also refers to cultural (or master) narratives in which “we are embedded as contemporary actors in history...Our sociological theories and concepts are encoded with aspects of these [cultural] narratives...[which] usually operate at a presuppositional level of social-science epistemology or beyond our awareness” (p. 619). In contemporary Western society, these may include neoliberalism, capitalism and democratism along with individualism and humanism, among others. These narratives also have plotlines, characters and actions similar to public narratives. They govern in a subtle way and often beyond our consciousness, as a precondition to how we
make sense of our living contexts. If we continue with leadership traits, it might be possible to relate these traits to cultural narratives of heroic leaders (strongly associated with discourses of individualism, autonomy, and masculinity). Such cultural narratives constitute an ideological character of a solo, strong, and powerful ‘man’ who needs to lead ‘weak’ or ‘unenlightened’ followers. In my study, I am able to trace these cultural narratives by paying particular attention to what academics imply in the broader context of their sense-making.

Both public and cultural narratives may come with variations (in terms of tropes, themes, forms of argument, and figures of speech) but they display discernable and internally consistent features (Fairhurst, 2009). They are sustained by a loosely defined collective of individuals who share a similar culture and context, and are employed by these people to create meanings for themselves and the world (Taylor, 2010). In the context of my study, these public and cultural narratives are discursive resources for academics to draw on in making sense of their leadership during the research interview. However, within the conditions of power relations (in a poststructuralist sense) or social forces (in a Bakhtinian sense), these narratives also exist with opportunities for resistance. That said, in any given context there exists alternative narratives, other ways of knowing and thinking, which individuals may have developed as a part of their sense of self (itself derived from discursive resources) throughout their lives (Weedon, 1997). These tensions between dominant and alternative narratives—manifest as complementary and contradictory subject positions—are ever present in the process of identity construction, which I explain next.

**Narratives as ongoing constructions of identities**

In recent years, identity construction (or identity work) has become a popular concept across disciplines, including leadership studies\(^{37}\). This concept indicates that identity is always in process or “a thing in motion” (Carroll & Levy, 2010, p. 215). It is opposite to an idea of identity as a given or a product of an individual,

often defined by the traditional paradigm in psychology (Gergen, 1991). Alvesson and his colleagues contend that:

[identity construction is] prompted by social interaction that raises questions of ‘who am I?’ and ‘who are we?’. In attempting to answer these questions, an individual crafts a self-narrative by drawing on cultural resources [including public and master narratives, in Somers’ terms] as well as memories and desires to reproduce or transform their sense of self. (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008, p. 15)

They argue further that individuals engage in more concentrated identity construction when they encounter doubts, tensions, ambivalence or queries in specific events—such as the research interviews used in this study (Alvesson, Ashcraft et al., 2008). Moreover, in the process of identity construction, “people are continuously engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626). Viewed this way, a self-narrative, or ontological narrative in Somers’ (1994) terms, enables individuals to form, repair, maintain, strengthen or revise their sense of self through differing subject positions. In doing so, they may draw on a range of discursive resources (including dominant and alternative narratives) and assemble them into their self-narratives of experiences and understandings (Smith & Sparkes, 2008; Taylor, 2005).

In the context of my study, within the research interview, academics were presumably forced to engage in more concentrated identity construction than they might do in their everyday lives. In this process, they may draw on a broad range of discursive resources and personalise them in relation to their previous experiences, possible futures, and understandings of leadership. Their discursive resources (including dominant and alternative narratives of leadership) both enable and constrain them to construct complementary and contradictory subject positions constituted within a matrix of power relations. As a result, their identities are viewed as (re)constructed in and through their ongoing self-narratives over the course of the research interview, and in the process of my analysis.
This particular understanding of narratives as ongoing constructions of identity highlights the complex and contradictory process of identity construction, which connects individuals' stories with wider public stories where dominant plots are always in tension with alternative plots. Bakhtin (1981) calls these tensions heteroglossia and argues that dominant narratives (centripetal forces) and alternative narratives (centrifugal forces) should be understood as interrelated dialogically. In other words, these complementary and contradictory resources do not only coexist within an ongoing construction of identities but also interrelate with one another in a dialogical way. As a result, I propose a third conceptualisation of narratives as dialogical relations.

**Narratives as dialogical relations**

Bakhtin’s conception of heteroglossia enables me to focus on the dialogical relations between different discursive resources and their co-constitutive effects. He emphasises the recognition of multiple voices, or what he calls polyphony, as a condition for any relational and social context (Bakhtin, 1984)\(^{38}\), and I interpret multiple voices as different discursive resources. He also argues that these voices are not only distinct and equally important, but also dialogically interrelated (Bakhtin, 1984). Viewed this way, differing discursive resources are given equal status in dialogical relationships despite the prevalence of dominant resources in a situated context.

Applying this conception to my study means recognising that each academic’s self-narrative has multiple voices (each with a unique plotline, value, and point of view), which are dialogically interrelated with one another. This draws our attention to how such interrelatedness constitutes unique subject positions that academics take up as part of their ongoing identity development. It also helps foreground both processes and effects of dialogical relations between discursive

\(^{38}\) Bakhtin’s conception of polyphony originated from the musical term in which two or more melodies are sung or played together at the same time (Nikulin, 1998). He appropriates polyphony by metaphorically describing it as “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses...with equal rights and each with its own world” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6); he also emphasises the important notion in polyphony which is “precisely what happens between various consciousnesses, that is, their interaction and interdependence” (1984, p. 36, original emphasis).
resources that coexist in social contexts. This focus has often been overlooked by leadership scholars investigating dominant and alternative discourses/narratives of leadership in organisations, as they tend to examine the constitutive effects of discursive resources as separate entities.

With this in mind, I want to note here that it is impossible to identify every dialogical relation embedded in academics’ self-narratives. What is more plausible, however, is to look at how the dominant discourses/narratives are frequently complemented as well as contradicted by certain alternative resources in individuals’ talk. I have already argued elsewhere that paying attention to such dialogical relations offers insights into how academics negotiate their identities within and through the constraints of their institutional contexts (Juntrasook et al., 2013). To conclude this section, I draw on de Peuter’s summary, which underpins my study:

By re-conceiving narratives as active dialogues, relationship is privileged over authorship; the multiple centres of organization of the self and their relationships, pursuing on the boundaries of self and other, identity and difference, may be celebrated rather than silenced, thus ensuring the dynamic tensions among opposing forces which in turn enable the dialogical self to be unfinalizable, emergent and ongoing. (de Peuter, 1998, p. 40)

Towards a discursive-dialogical approach to narrative identities

Conceptualising narrative in three interdependent ways enables me to develop a framework for my study, which I call a discursive-dialogic approach. Despite appearing in sequence, these processes should be understood as interspersed and more nuanced and messy than, perhaps, my explanation has shown them to be. Altogether, this conceptual framework provides analytical tools for me to examine different dimensions of narratives and processes of identity construction in relation to leadership in academia.

Viewing narratives as discursive resources helps me identify discourses and narratives of leadership that are prevalent in public and also in my participants’
accounts. These dominant resources shape how academics make sense of their leadership, enabling and constraining them to construct certain subject positions and identities. Such discursive resources are located in a matrix of power relations, which render certain ways of thinking and acting in relation to leadership intelligible and possible. However, within the exercise of power, these dominant discourses and narratives also coexist alongside possibilities for resistance (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). In this light, academics might draw upon alternative resources which they may have developed as part of their sense of self over time (Weedon, 1997). As a result, there are tensions between dominant and alternative resources (or centripetal and centrifugal forces in Bakhtin's terms), which are linked to the next conceptualisation.

Continuing from the first conceptualisation, narratives are viewed as an ongoing construction of identities. In this way, academics are active in their identity work by drawing on available discursive resources (including discourses and narratives as well as their memories and desires) to make sense of their leadership. In so doing, they continuously take up subject positions constituted through these resources which both enable and constrain them in forming, repairing, maintaining, or revising their sense of self and identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Their self-narratives, accordingly, become sites of complex and contradictory processes of identity construction between micro and macro forces (Thomas, 2009), between dominant and alternative resources, and between different, often competing, subject positions. These opposing forces (be they social forces, discursive resources or subject positions) do not simply coexist in any given context but interrelate with one another in a dialogical way.

Following the second conceptualisation, discursive resources not only coexist but also dialogically interrelate with one another. This understanding enables me to focus on dialogic relations/tensions between discursive resources, both dominant and alternative, and their constitutive effects at both individual and social levels. It allows me to examine academics' identities, constituted through these relations/tensions, as unique, complex, contradictory, always incomplete, and always unfinalised (Kondo, 1990).

So far, in this chapter I have considered the key theoretical resources based on
my interpretations and understandings of social constructionism, with poststructuralist and Bakhtinian emphases. I have argued that these theoretical resources enable me to examine leadership, especially its meaning, as socially constructed, contextual, discursive, dialogic and unfinalised. Building on these theoretical resources, I have developed a conceptual framework that connects narratives to the process of identity construction. I have argued that this conceptual framework enables me to examine personal and cultural narratives of leadership, especially how they both enable and constrain academics in their identity construction.

In the next chapter, I demonstrate how the theoretical resources and conceptual framework discussed in this chapter informed my research methodologies. I discuss in detail how I conducted and made methodological decisions throughout this study.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGICAL JOURNEY
Mapping research design and methods

Although statistics can be extremely useful they tell us little about people's subjective experiences nor about their beliefs and their ideas. As leadership’s focus is very much upon subjectively located interactions, there is a need for studies that tell us something about the subjective and the personal, about ideas and beliefs, about how people talk and dream about leadership, the stories and narratives they construct in their talking and dreaming. (Ford et al., 2008, p. 7)

In what ways might we study how academics experience and make sense of their leadership in academia? What methods may help us gather and analyse leaders’ experiences, ideas and beliefs, how they talk and construct their stories and narratives about leadership (Ford et al., 2008)? Guided by these questions, my focus in this chapter is to outline the research design and methods underpinning this study. It is also to recount my journey as a researcher, especially how I made decisions throughout the research process. I begin this chapter by discussing the key assumptions of the qualitative interview approach that I employed in this study. Alongside this discussion, I detail the practices of reflexivity that formed a significant part of my research design and conduct. In what follows, I outline my strategies of recruitment, how I conducted and transcribed interviews and selected institutional documents for analysis. I then discuss in detail my analytical approach and practices drawing on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks I outlined in Chapter 3. I end this chapter by contemplating my practices of writing and representation, and ethical considerations for this study.
Doing qualitative research

My choice of research approach and methods was necessarily informed by my research aims and questions (Chapter 1) in combination with the theoretical and conceptual framework of my study (Chapter 3). Although social constructionism (including poststructuralist and Bakhtinian thinking) does not necessarily suggest a particular methodological practice, most researchers adopting this perspective draw on qualitative methodologies (Burr, 2003; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). These researchers share similar research methods with those holding other (sometimes overlapping) interpretivist perspectives (e.g. grounded, (neo)realist, critical, phenomenological). Broadly, qualitative researchers are concerned with people’s subjective experiences, how they think and feel about certain phenomena, in specific contexts (Alvesson, 2002; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Flick, 2006; Hatch, 2002; Holliday, 2007). They tend to use qualitative methods such as interviews, observation, documents and, more recently, visual and performative strategies in their research (Creswell, 2013; Ezzy, 2002; Macdonald et al., 2002).

Macdonald and her colleagues (2002) argue, however, that what distinguishes social constructionists (with a poststructuralist orientation) from other interpretivist scholars are the types of questions they ask, the ways they collect and interpret data, and the conclusions they derive from the analysis. Broadly, this group of researchers, myself included, do not view data as representing a particular reality, or seek to uncover the meaning of lived experiences; rather, they are interested in “the discursive resources...the interviewee (and perhaps the interviewer) draw on to constitute themselves as subjects and the consequences of this in terms of power and their social and cultural positioning and responses” (Macdonald et al., 2002, p. 143). In this study I am interested in the discursive resources academics draw on to constitute themselves as certain kinds of leaders in their professional contexts.

By adopting qualitative methods, I am aware that my study and I, as a researcher, might be positioned as the other within the dominant discourse of leadership studies (especially in North America). Despite a growing number of
qualitative researchers in this field, qualitative research continues to remain less visible, and somewhat marginalised, in comparison to quantitative research (Bryman, 2004). Historically, the status of qualitative methods in leadership studies has been “either subsidiary to the quantitative component in mixed methods research or mimics some of the features of quantitative research…but without numbers” (Bryman, 2011, p. 26). This may not be a surprise considering the field of leadership studies, both in the context of HE and elsewhere, has been eclipsed by quantitative methods over the past century (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). What quantitative research promises is an ability to predict and prescribe the phenomenon, offering practical advice to ‘leaders’ and their organisations (Bolden et al., 2011). This approach has informed the dominant discursive practices of leadership researchers from past to present.

In contrast to these practices, a number of qualitative researchers assert that the field of leadership studies would derive considerable benefit from utilising qualitative methods (Bolden et al., 2011; Ford et al., 2008). Such methods might potentially enable researchers to think and ask questions about leadership in different ways (Bryman, 2011). In so doing, these researchers may come to realise that “leadership research does not simply need to describe the world but can also transform it” (Bolden et al., 2011, p. 176). Despite these potential benefits, one of the most common criticisms directed toward qualitative research is its lack of ‘validity’, which renders its untrustworthy.

This issue of ‘validity’ has been taken up and debated by a number of scholars across disciplines and approaches over the past decades (Angen, 2000). Within the debates, there are multiple suggestions for rethinking ‘validity’ beyond ‘positivistic’ and ‘post-positivistic’ paradigms (see Alvesson, 2002; Angen, 2000; Lather, 2003; Polkinghorne, 2007; Scheurich, 1995b; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). For this study, I draw on a combination of narrativist, feminist, poststructuralist and other critical perspectives in social research, and invite the reader to evaluate my study according to the criteria which follow. The study should demonstrate “[c]redible empirical material and careful analysis, strong arguments for conclusions, good anchoring in the literature and an ability to establish a critical dialogue with other research texts” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 167). In line with these criteria, I also include two additional considerations: leaving
analyses and conclusions open to continued reinterpretation (Angen, 2000); and explicating how I claim to know what I know (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). Having outlined these criteria and considerations, I turn now to my methodological practices. In the section that follows, I discuss the main research method I employed for data collection in this study, namely, the qualitative interview.

**Employing the interview as a research method**

Qualitative leadership researchers tend to favour qualitative interviewing\(^{39}\) as the main method of data collection (Bryman, 2004; Bryman, Stephens, & Campo, 1996). The interview can be applied to diverse topics, research designs, and analytical approaches (Bryman, 2011), yielding a flexibility that many find appealing. For this study, I attempted to understand how academics at a NZ university made sense of, and talked about, their own (and others’) leadership in the context of their professional lives. Rather than focusing on what actually happened in ‘reality’, I was more interested in exploring what made it possible for these academics to construct themselves as particular kinds of leaders (or not) in their talk.

Accordingly, I employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the principal strategy for gathering qualitative data. Following Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) advice on three-dimensional narratives, I devised the interview questions encompassing temporality (past, present, and future), personal and social interaction, and place (situation) in relation to leadership from my participants’ experiences and perspectives (see Appendix C). These questions were aimed at gathering both stories and rationales, or what Polkinghorne (1995) classifies as diachronic and synchronic data respectively. Diachronic data contain details of episodes and their relationships based on (auto)biographical accounts while synchronic data contain reasons, beliefs, and statements of individuals (Polkinghorne, 1995).

\(^{39}\) Qualitative interviewing is a term “taken to include semi-structured, in-depth, unstructured, and biographical interviewing” (Bryman, 2004, p. 750)
Even though most of my interview questions centred on producing stories, as is often suggested by narrative researchers (see Chase, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1995), I also asked a number of questions focusing on rationales (including “what do you mean by...?, “why do you do that?”). Both types of data, I argue, are usually interwoven in human conversation, including research interviews. When individuals tell stories, they not only talk about their experiences but also justify, revise, repair, or strengthen these stories by drawing on general knowledge (or socially established resources) in their talk. Both diachronic and synchronic data, therefore, enabled me to gain insights into how my participants made sense of their lives, and the variety of discursive resources that they drew on in constructing their narrative accounts.

Traditionally, the research interview has been viewed as an unproblematic method for collecting qualitative data (Ezzy, 2010; Gudmundsdottir, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Nairn, Munro, & Smith, 2005). Researchers working from positivistic and post-positivistic paradigms often take for granted the relational dynamics between interviewer and interviewee (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Scheurich, 1995a). They tend to understate the complexity and ambiguity of human interaction, which are inevitably present in the research interview. Scheurich (1995a), for example, warns us that researchers and their participants usually have different motivations, consciously or unconsciously, to be involved in the study. Their power relations are always at stake and constantly negotiated during the interview session (Scheurich, 1995a). “The language out of which the questions are constructed”, he argues, “is not bounded or stable; it is persistently slippery, unstable, and ambiguous from person to person, from situation to situation, from time to time” (Scheurich, 1995a, p. 240). For that matter, participants’ self-narratives produced during the interviews should be understood as co-constructed accounts between two speakers—the interviewer and interviewee.

In the co-construction of narrative accounts, I contributed mainly through asking questions, clarifying words and sentences and occasionally paraphrasing. My awareness of the relationality of qualitative interviews prompted me to be mindful about what I can claim as individuals’ data; and how to (re)present my situatedness within their accounts in a way that recognises the complex and
ambiguous conditions of the interview. I will discuss this further in the section on conducting the interviews.

**Practising reflexivity**

Reflexivity is crucial for qualitative researchers. It is, however, one of the most confusing and contested terms used across disciplines and different theoretical terrains (Chia, 1996; Lynch, 2000; Macbeth, 2001; Pillow, 2003, 2010; Salzman, 2002). A number of scholars have attempted to formulate different typologies from the existing qualitative research literature (see Alvesson, Hardy, & Harley, 2008; Anderson, 1989; Denzin, 1997; Finlay, 2002; Lynch, 2000; Marcus, 1994). However, the variety and contestation between these typologies signals multiple possibilities of how reflexivity can be practised.

Predominantly, reflexivity consists of researchers’ critical reflection on their positionings in relation to their participants, the topic, and the world they are studying, and/or the writing process as an act of representation (Gray, 2008; Usher, 1993). Pillow (2010) argues that reflexivity is inevitably linked with researchers’ methodological and epistemological foundations. She writes, “Reflexivity can only be as strong, as rigorous, as our own knowledge base and our abilities to continually and critically interrogate our knowledges and constructions” (Pillow, 2010, p. 275).

Apart from my positionings or the ‘baggage’ I discussed in Chapter 1, I am also embedded in a discursive web of power relations with participants, academic communities, and knowledges in the fields of leadership and HE. I am both enabled and constrained by social and cultural resources that are available to me, the resources that shape the ways I think, talk, and write about leadership in academia. Thus, every choice I have made during the research process, including the choices I am making in this very moment of writing, reflects my own subjectivity and intersubjectivity with others in this web, who may or may not share commonalities with me. In my reflexive practice I attempted to identify my positionings and critically reflect on the knowledge claims I make in this study.
During the interviews I was aware of how participants perceived me as their audience and interviewer, which contributed to the ways in which they constructed narrative accounts with, and for, me (see discussion in Alvesson, 2003; and also in Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Perhaps I seemed like an insider (somebody who understood the context of HE in general and their institution in particular) and/or an outsider (a foreign doctoral student who was located outside of their department). Acknowledging that I am an ‘audience’ as well as a ‘researcher’ has enabled me to be more attentive to the issues of voice, representation, and interpretive authority that are inseparable from data analysis and research writing (Denzin, 2001). I will come back to these issues later in this chapter.

Following Pillow (2010), I kept a research diary, documenting my fieldnotes, thoughts and feelings, during the study. I included specific details of date, time, and place of events, especially the interview sessions. Using this diary permitted an awareness of my own positionings in relation to the participants and the research topic, my perspectives of different individuals’ ways of being, my self-judgements, emotions, and moments of uncertainty throughout the research process (see for example notes from my research diary in the section describing the interview process). Ultimately, this diary was a rich resource for the analysis and writing process.

In the following sections, I outline the practical decisions I made in relation to how I collected, analysed, interpreted, and re-presented the data.

**Recruiting participants**

In this study, I recruited 19 participants who were employed as full-time academic staff at one university in NZ. The decision to focus on a single setting was both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enabled me to examine how the same institutional practices in relation to leadership may shape individual academics’ ways of thinking, talking, and practising leadership differently. Practically, conducting interviews in one location was helpful because I could concentrate on my interviews and initial analyses without having to be concerned
about travelling and accommodation. It also offered my participants the flexibility to change their scheduled appointments when needed.

Nevertheless, focusing on one institution may limit the level of transferability of my findings (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Since every institution has its own unique history, culture, and environment, this may shape the ways that individuals experience and make sense of their professional lives. However, this limitation can be ameliorated by comparing the findings with other research on leadership in order to identify similarities and differences, as I will demonstrate in later chapters.

I began recruiting participants by creating an advertisement (see Appendix A) that invited full-time academics at The University, irrespective of position, discipline, ethnicity, social and cultural background, to take part in this study. The advertisement included a brief description of the study, the inclusion criteria, expectations of participants, and my contact details. I contacted departmental administrators in all academic departments, asking them to circulate and display the advertisement through various channels. These included sending emails via departmental staff mailing lists, and displaying printed posters in areas such as staff notice boards and departmental common rooms. At the same time, I also placed the advertisement in the university’s weekly staff newsletter for two consecutive weeks.

Initially, I hoped to recruit between sixteen to twenty academics from four main disciplines (sciences, health sciences, humanities, and business) and rankings (lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, and professor) in order to maximise variation amongst participants. This maximisation was aimed at generating diverse accounts of experiences from academics with different backgrounds without attempting to attain statistical representativeness. This manageable

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40 Presumably, many participants were also drawing on experiences from other institutions they had been involved with as well.

41 In this thesis, I call the institution where my study took place The University. This institution shares similar characteristics with other research-intensive universities in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere.
number of participants also enabled a deepening of understanding of each individual case in the analysis process (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Within two weeks, I received responses from twelve academics, seven women and five men – all through emails. As the number of responses was smaller than I initially hoped, I contemplated any unforeseen problems with my recruitment strategy. On reflection, I realised that the period of my recruitment was close to the beginning of a new semester (late February 2011), one of the busiest times of the year for most academics. Because of that, many academics may have been too busy to notice my advertisements, which might explain the smaller number of responses than initially anticipated. After consultation with my supervisors, I decided to advertise again. The subsequent email was sent to all academics and emphasised that it was crucial for my study to recruit academics from diverse backgrounds and positions. Within a week of the second advertisement, I received nine responses, four women and five men. Together with the first round of responses, there were twenty-one academics, eleven women and ten men, in total.

In the process of selection, only two men of twenty-one academics did not fit the inclusion criteria because they were not full-time academics at The University. As a result, eleven women and eight men ultimately participated, with fifteen identifying as Pākehā, three as Māori, and one as Pasifika. In terms of discipline, five participants were from health sciences, five from sciences, five from social sciences and humanities, and four from business studies. Two participants were employed as postdoctoral fellows, two as lecturers, two as senior research fellows, four as senior lecturers, five as associate professors, and

42 These two men were on part-time contracts. After initial contacts with both of them, I realised that they only spent a few hours working (mostly teaching) at the university so I declined their offer to participate in this study because their working conditions were significantly different from the rest of the participants.

43 Pākehā is a Māori term used to refer to white settlers in NZ. Currently, there is considerable debate about this term, as some people of settler origin prefer other terms such as White or NZ European. Nevertheless, the term Pākehā implies a historical relationship with Māori (Sibley & Liu, 2004), which is why I have chosen to use it in this research project.

44 I did not assume that because participants identified with similar ethnic backgrounds that they shared similar upbringings, values, or life experiences. I will discuss the notion of ethnic diversity further in the final chapter.
four as professors. Two participants held the position of Head of Department (or equivalent), one was an Acting Head of Department (or equivalent), two were employed as Deputy Head of Department (or equivalent), and four were Director of Programme (or equivalent). The proportion of men and women academics was relatively balanced in all disciplines, academic rankings, and headship positions.

The chosen participants were contacted by email with an information sheet and consent form (see Appendix B) to consider whether they wished to proceed. Within a few days, I received responses from all participants agreeing to take part in this study. I then asked them to send me their curricula vitae (CV), in order that I might use it in interviews. However, after receiving their CVs, I decided not to use them in the interviews because I realised they might limit my engagement with participants. In contemporary societies, the CV is often used to present a “human capital focussed version of identity” (Higgins, Nairn, & Sligo, 2009, p. 84). It is also a tool for performance-appraisal schemes such as PBRF, which position individual academics as productive or performative subjects while ignoring or hiding other parts of their lives (Metcalfe, 1992). My decision to not use the CVs enabled me to explore my participants’ personal and professional experiences in a more spontaneous way without preoccupation with their CV’s more instrumental ‘version of identity’.

**Conducting the interviews**

From March to August 2010, I conducted 19 interviews with participants, in their own offices, with the exception of one interview, which I conducted in a café near The University. Each interview lasted approximately one-and-a-half hours, and was audio-recorded for transcription and analysis. The interviews consisted of a series of questions about the participants’ career trajectories, their experiences and understandings of themselves as leaders, and other people’s leadership from their perspective (see the interview questions in Appendix C).

45 In this study, I categorise the positions of postdoctoral fellow and lecturer under ‘early-career academic’; senior research fellow and senior lecturer under ‘mid-career academic’; and associate professor and professor under ‘senior academic’.
As discussed in Chapter 2, throughout the process of recruitment and confirmation, and in the advertisement and participant information sheet, I was careful not to define ‘leadership’ because I wanted to explore how academics made sense of, and talked about, leadership in their own terms. Following Pye (2005), it is important for my study—underpinned by a social constructionist perspective—to grant participants the “power to define meaning” (p. 34) instead of imposing my definition on them. My openness to the definition of leadership enabled me to explore its social construction, which inevitably depends on available discursive resources embedded within the material and social realities in each individual’s life. This research practice differs from the majority of leadership studies in HE and other contexts where researchers often define the meaning of leadership for the sake of generalisability and predictability in their studies (Ford & Lawler, 2007).

Despite the same sequence of interview questions, each interview was always unique: for example, the ways I expressed sentences, the ways I dressed, the ways I responded and moved were inevitably unique to each interview context. Here are two examples of entries from my research diary, which reflect on this:

Reflection from the first interview:

The interview today was not as bad as I feared although there were some moments where I felt frustrated with myself especially the way I asked questions. Perhaps, I was a bit nervous since this was my first interview and I could hear myself talking with a louder-than-usual voice. I wonder whether she noticed that or not. I was also a bit distracted at the beginning, not sure what was going on in my mind. I think I was worried if I would be able to ask all the questions that I’d prepared. But after a while, I felt more comfortable and more able to concentrate, which helped a lot. What annoyed me the most, however, was that I observed myself wanting to ask more questions to generate stories, yet in reality I asked a lot of ‘why’ questions that required her to do the opposite (Research Diary, 8 March 2010).
Reflections from the tenth interview:

Today I felt very relaxed and was able to become more open during the interview. I asked him some reflexive questions, questions that I think challenged him to see contradictions between what he’d just said and what he said earlier in the interview. Perhaps, it’s the experience I have gained throughout these interviews that has made me feel more confident to engage in a reflexive moment with my participants. I was also able to question some of his understandings about leadership, and was then surprised when he said he enjoyed reflecting on those taken-for-granted ideas as well. Today I felt like I was not only a researcher but a conversation partner in a genuine dialogue. Being able to do that did not only give me a good feeling but also generated some good stories and responses that were also interesting and important for my research (Research Diary, 29 April 2010).

Although these reflections were subjective and might not reflect what the participants actually felt during the interviews, they exemplify the uniqueness of what happened, at least for me as a researcher, in each interview. My experience of the first interview prompted me to become more prepared before meeting with future participants. I tried to familiarise myself with the interview questions, so I knew what I wanted to ask, and felt more confident with the direction I wanted to follow. This preparation enabled me to become more relaxed, flexible, and ‘present’ with participants.

After each interview, I often asked the participant to reflect on her or his experience of being interviewed. The manner of my question was very informal as we were concluding our conversation. Some participants said the interview provided them with space to articulate ideas and reflections about their work and life. Some said it opened up an opportunity for them to express their thoughts and emotions, to regain their dignity, to recall their special memories, and to remind themselves of why they chose to become academics. Of all these reflections, the words of one participant struck me the most:
I often participate in research projects by students or other researchers because I’m more curious about the questions. That is, in part, how I learn. I’m always curious about what people are doing and how they’re doing it and, of course, you’re very interesting because I see you very rarely refer to your question sheet. You know most of your questions, so obviously, you’ve done it before. You know how to guide them. You know where you’re going. You know roughly what you’re looking for.

(Participant’s reflection, the fifteenth interview, 28 May 2010)

This reflection exemplifies how the researcher’s subjectivity is always implicated in the interview process as well as the participants’. Interestingly, the reflection above suggests two important aspects of the interview process. First, it is a two-way communication. Researchers are not the only individuals in the interview interaction to observe: in my interviews with academics I was simultaneously researcher and researched. From this participant’s comment, it seemed that the questions I asked were as important as the way I asked them. My appearance and efficiency can be perceived and interpreted by participants in many different ways, which may shape how they responded to my questions accordingly. Second, my research participants were not naïve. They have their own agendas for choosing to participate in the research. The researcher can never know precisely what is going through each participant’s mind during an interview (Schostak, 2006; Taylor, 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 3, individuals usually construct their narrative accounts in relation to who they communicate with (Bakhtin, 1986a; Harré, 1990). This also applies to how participants construct particular ‘versions’ of their experiences and understandings for the researcher, which are unique to the specific interaction. Acknowledging the unique nature of an interview, I do not suggest that the content from individuals’ accounts is totally original, or uniquely produced for the particular occasion. Instead, individuals are likely to draw on the discursive resources that they are already familiar with to construct their narrative accounts (Taylor, 2010). Because of that, their accounts can be understood as reflecting both the specific moment of telling as well as the always-partial representation of their lives; “it is a new version and not a wholly new creation” of their narrative identities (Taylor, 2005, p. 48, original emphasis).
Transcribing the interviews

Following each interview, I listened to the audio file and took notes about the emotions and actions that I could still remember from the interview that might not be apparent when it was transcribed. Because of time constraints and difficulty in understanding some of my participants’ accents, I decided to employ a professional transcriber who lived in another city for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality. After receiving each interview transcription from this person, I then checked the accuracy of it by listening to the interview audio file a few times. Even with multiple checks, however, I acknowledge that there may still be errors and inconsistencies between the written transcription and the audio recording of the interview. These discrepancies cannot be avoided even by experienced transcribers (Poland, 1995).

Despite my attempt to (re)produce the transcripts as accurately as possible, the act of transcribing, including decisions about what to include and represent in a transcript, is never neutral and transparent (Lapadat, 2000; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Niemants, 2012). Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) argue that researchers’ choices about transcription reflect the theories they hold as part of the analytic process. My decision was made on the basis that my analysis focused on the discursive resources my participants drew on in their talk, hence the narrative as a whole was more important than the detailed second-to-second sequences of data. This choice of transcription did not require a technical level of detail often associated with certain analytic approaches including conversation analysis (Lapadat, 2000). I therefore did not deploy any linguistic conventions and symbols to represent different aspects of interview data including intonation, terminal pitch, accent and lengthening, voice quality, phonetic segments, environmental noises, and duration, among others (Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming, & Paolino, 1993). I elected to organise and present participants’ accounts in a more ‘tidy’ convention by organising them in a relatively easy to read format yet maintained their expressions in the transcripts as much as I could. This way of representing the interview transcripts enabled me to focus on the content and the broader patterns of their narratives as well as the ways in which those narratives were (co-)constructed by my participants (and myself, as their audience).
After ensuring the transcripts were as accurate as possible, I sent the participants a copy to check for any errors or personal information that they did not want to appear in the final transcription. Most participants made no changes in their transcripts while some asked to make some minor corrections, mainly about the name of a course, project, committee or conference. None requested to withdraw their transcripts from this study.

**Selecting institutional documents**

In order to examine how academics made sense of their leadership within a field of power relations, I also needed to understand how leadership was ‘officially’ constructed within The University where they worked. As a result, I decided to include an analysis of institutional documents alongside participants’ accounts, which enabled me to compare the ways in which leadership was constructed by both academics and their institution (see my analyses in Chapter 5). In other words, including institutional documents as part of my analysis allowed me to become more attentive to the micro-politics of leadership in HE at both institutional and individual levels.

To select the institutional documents, I began by gathering available documents from both printed and online sources with the criteria that they must contain the terms ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’. Despite the systematic search, the selection of documents did not aim to represent the institutional documents as a whole. Rather, it aimed to provide examples of existing ‘official’ documents that not only construct certain knowledge about leadership within the institution but also would impact on the everyday life of individual academics, including the participants in this study (Foucault, 1980; Smith, 1987). By following this process, I chose three particular types of documents for my analysis: the academic leadership development programme, the academic staff promotion policy document, and academic job advertisements. They were chosen purposefully because they provided different ‘official’ constructs of leadership that were arguably important for individual academics in their working environment (see more discussion in Chapter 5).
Analysing the transcripts and institutional documents

In Chapter 3, I proposed a discursive-dialogic approach, based on social constructionism, with poststructuralist and Bakhtinian emphases, as the conceptual framework for this study. It provided analytical tools to examine the different dimensions of narratives and the processes of identity construction in relation to leadership in academia. In line with this, I also ‘strategically borrowed’ (Devault, 1990) the analytic procedure offered by a number of discourse analysts as guidelines to follow (see Taylor, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Willig, 2008; Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2008). Basically, discourse analysis is a social constructionist and poststructuralist tool that examines how language constructs the ‘reality’ of an individual’s life and of social life more broadly (Potter, 1996, 2004).

In the analysis process, I began reading and re-reading interview transcripts (and cross-checking audio files), searching through participants’ accounts for themes. These themes were read drawing on the theoretical resources afforded by social constructionism, poststructuralism, and Bakhtinian concepts. I am aware that my use of ‘theme’ may invoke a reductionist attempt to fit all the individuals’ accounts into a neat thematic category, assuming that the reader will make sense of it the same way – this is not my intention. Rather, I use theme in this study as a helpful tool to organise my interpretations of participants’ accounts. In so doing, I acknowledge that each theme is open to multiple interpretations from the reader, and also consists of attributes that may overlap with one another.

As signalled earlier, my own positionings also inevitably influenced how, and what sense I made of the accounts. Through this ongoing and iterative process (Taylor, 2001), I was looking for not only commonalities but also disjunctions and contradictions within and across participants’ talk. The categorisation of themes were derived from overarching patterns in relation to how participants constructed their narratives of leadership as well as my understandings from the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2.
In the end, I identified three main themes that appeared in all the participants’ accounts. The first theme focused on the contested meanings of leadership defined by the participants (and their institution). This was made evident by the different ways in which participants drew on, articulated, and brought particular meanings of leadership into existence in their talk (see Chapter 5). The second theme focuses on the dominant narratives across academics’ accounts of their leadership in academia. Dominant narratives were apparent in the different yet interconnected storylines, which the participants actively and discursively employed to construct their leadership accounts (see Chapter 6). The third theme focuses on the different, often contradictory, discourses of effective leadership in academia, which could be discerned in the way academics appropriated both themselves and others as certain kinds of in/effective leaders in their talk (see Chapter 7).

Working on each theme, I applied a discursive-dialogic approach, to examine academics’ narrative accounts. Within this process, I paid attention to narrative choices the academics made during the interviews – whether they were fully aware of those choices or not – as it may indicate the kind of discursive resources (including discourses and narratives) they favoured in their talk about leadership (Gergen, 1999; Taylor, 2006; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). I then examined what constitutive effects these resources might have for individual academics and what these effects might tell us about the institutional and broader socio-cultural contexts in which the academics are located.

In choosing the narratives to (re)present, I paid attention to the focus of each theme, the similarities and differences among the narratives, the quality of exemplification, and last, but not least, my desire to tell a good story (Richardson, 1990). Throughout this process, I tried to be reflexive as described earlier to ensure a balance between my subjectivity as a researcher and the rigorous practice of analytic procedure. In qualitative research, measures of quality of analysis and trustworthiness of research accounts are partly determined by how open and reflexive the researchers are about their analytic decisions (Angen, 2000).
In addition to the analysis of interview transcripts, I also examined the institutional documents to complement my analysis of the first theme (see Chapter 5). The combined analysis helped me understand and compare different meanings of leadership from both institutional and academics’ perspectives. Using document analysis enabled me to identify institutional discourses and subject positions that are made available within them (Marston, 2002). It also provided a tool to investigate “how power operates [within the institution] and the consequences of this operation” (Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider, 2008, p. 133) for individual academics. In this analysis, I began by reading through the selected documents as described in the earlier section to explore how the participants’ institution defined, implicitly or explicitly, the meaning of leadership in its documents. In particular I focused on how these documents produced certain ways of thinking about leadership, and asked questions about the effects of these for individual academics in their everyday lives.

**Thinking about writing and representation**

Writing about research findings is not a straightforward process. It involves not only a researcher’s interpretive act but also their construction of narratives and their positioning within the broader field(s) of knowledge (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Czarniawska, 2004b; Hatch, 2002). In this process, researchers are themselves narrators as much as their participants:

As narrators, then, researchers develop meaning out of, and some sense of order in, the material they studied; they develop their own voice(s) as they construct others’ voices and realities; they narrate ‘results’ in ways that are both enabled and constrained by the social resources and circumstances embedded in their disciplines, cultures, and historical moments; and they write or perform their work for particular audiences. (Chase, 2005, p. 657)

Understanding writing in this way, I do not claim to give ‘voice’ to my participants, as researchers working with narrative data often do (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). The narratives of my participants, as well as my own, do not represent the coherent identities of individuals. Adopting a social constructionist
perspective, I view narrative identities as multiple, fragmented, discursive, emerging, incomplete, performative, and contextual (Gergen, 1991; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000: Sparkes & Smith, 2008). Because of that, I chose to focus my study more on the narratives rather than the narrator in order to avoid representing individuals as coherent or enduring subjects. Moreover, despite the fact that I drew on participants’ narratives to illustrate each of the three main themes, it is possible that they will not agree with my interpretations. Indeed, I take responsibility and claim authorship in the selection, organisation, and transformation of participant narratives into one comprehensive story – the story of my research as a whole.

After careful consideration, I decided to use a minimal form of reference, instead of a pseudonym, to introduce and anonymise participants and their narratives in the following analysis chapters. In so doing, I assigned code numbers (Px) to participants according to the order of their appearance (P1, P2, P3) even when I was referring to the same person. As a result, the same participant may be first assigned P1 and later P6 without any connection between them. This choice of practice derived from both theoretical and ethical considerations. Theoretically, the use of first-names “brings its own rhetorical baggage” (Billig, 1999, p. 554) which I tried to avoid here46. Following Billig (1999) and Taylor (2010, 2012), I also wanted to focus my study on the narratives rather than the person who speaks, given that I understand a person’s identity as fluid, incoherent and always in the process of “ongoing construction and negotiation in talk” (Taylor, 2010, p. 7). Ethically, given the suggestion by Tolich (2004), this decision was made to prevent the reader from connecting information from different parts of this thesis, considering that my study only focused on one particular institution in NZ. It can be viewed as part of my ethical considerations, which I discuss next in the final section.

46 Despite my attempts to avoid rhetorical baggage in relation to the assignment of first-names for my participants, I acknowledge that such rhetorical baggage is unavoidable. Throughout this thesis, I still attribute certain subject positions to my participants (such as early-career/mid-career/senior academic, or male/female) in order to provide relevant context for staging my analysis.
Contemplating ethical considerations

Like any form of research involving human participants, there are important ethical considerations for this study. First was the possibility that taking part in an interview may cause participants some emotional distress. This possibility derives from the nature of a qualitative interview, which may invoke intense emotions for the participants when talking about some aspects of their personal and professional lives, including relationships with their colleagues and significant others (Shaw, 2011). This understanding is not uncommon among researchers studying sensitive topics (Bondi, 2007; Cowles, 1988; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liampittong, 2006, 2009). Prior to the first interview, I developed a list of existing contacts for health and professional services and resources that were available within the participants’ institution if they were needed.

The second concern was related to the ethical principle of confidentiality (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Considering the small size of the academic community in NZ, it might not be too difficult to identify a participant from details given in the interviews. Moreover, Tolich (2004) distinguishes ‘external confidentiality’ from ‘internal confidentiality’, the former as more conventional and the latter as less apparent. He points out that ‘external confidentiality’ refers to preventing participants from being identified by outsiders of the study during research presentations while ‘internal confidentiality’ refers to preventing them from being identified by other participants in the same study (Tolich, 2004). I was therefore mindful of ensuring participants’ confidentiality, and deployed various strategies to prevent identification.

47 I received the human ethics approval from the Human Ethics Committee at the University of Otago. In the process of participant recruitment, I sent the information sheet and the consent form (Appendix B) to all potential participants at the beginning of our communication. In these documents, the participants were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage. These documents also included information about the purpose of this study, the nature of data collection, and the possible channels of research dissemination. This information enabled participants to be fully informed of their involvement and their rights in this study before choosing to consent to participate in this study.
These strategies included removing any details that could identify a participant’s institution, department, discipline or specific identification. I also had to consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether I needed to omit information or stories told by participants in order to avoid potential damage towards participants or others implicated in their stories. But as Tolich (2004) himself admits, it is impossible to achieve absolute confidentiality of participants because of unanticipated situations. Nevertheless, I have done my best throughout my study to handle participants’ information with respect, in order to protect them from any disadvantage.

So far, I have discussed my methodological stance and research methods, providing a map of how this study has been designed and carried out. In the following three chapters, I explore how the academics made sense of, and talked about, their experiences and understandings of leadership, with a particular focus on how their identities were constituted in and through their narrative constructions. Within these chapters, I employ different strategies of analytical focus and ways of organising and re-presenting the data (which I will explain at the beginning of each chapter). These strategies enable me to focus on different aspects of my participants’ narratives and how they could be analysed and re-presented in illuminating ways. The results of my analyses, however, should be taken as contingent upon my theoretical understandings, reflecting precisely, in Bakhtin’s (1984) terms, the unfinalisability of meaning.
CHAPTER 5

WHO COUNTS?
Narratives of legitimate leadership

Despite over half a century of research into leadership, we appear to be no nearer a consensus as to its basic meaning, let alone whether it can be taught or its moral effects measured and predicted. (Grint, 2005a, pp. 14-15)

In his book, *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities*, Grint (2005a) contends that leadership is an ‘essentially contested concept’ 48. Its definitions, meanings and interpretations continue to multiply, and perplex us despite ongoing and detailed attempts to resolve this dilemma from within scholarly and public domains. Considering the increasing number of academic and popular texts about ‘leadership’ in the global market 49, it might not surprise us that its definition has not, or perhaps cannot, be consolidated. In the academic context, this term has its own historical, material and discursive background (as reviewed in Chapter 2). It has been conceptualised and defined in various, often contradictory ways, by scholars and practitioners holding different perspectives and values (Middlehurst et al., 2009). For that matter, there have already been a number of attempts to map the meanings and interpretations of leadership in HE (see, for example, Bolden et al., 2008b; Kekäle, 1999; Marshall et al., 2001; Middlehurst, 1993). What remains largely overlooked, however, is how these meanings may constitute discursive effects in individuals’ lives.

In this chapter, I attempt to examine some of the contested meanings of leadership expressed by the academics and their institution in this study. I look

48 The term ‘Essentially Contested Concepts’ (ECC) was coined by W. B. Gallie (1955-1956, 1956). Concepts such as leadership are often used by different parties with different meanings: each party insist that their use is proper, and others not.

49 On the website of www.amazon.com, there are approximately 83,000 books related to the topic of “leadership” (accessed on 25 July 2012), whereas in 2003 there were approximately 14,000 books related to the same topic (Grint, 2005a).
at the different ways in which the academics drew on, articulated, and brought particular meanings of leadership into existence in their talk. I focus particularly on how these meanings, viewed as discursive resources, constitute a range of subject positions, which academics take up in constructing narratives of leadership. Along this line of analysis, I also look at the discursive effects of how taking up certain subject positions may constitute academics’ identities as (il)legitimate leaders in their contexts.

During the process of analysis, I decided to include some of the institutional documents in order to explore the ‘official’ use of the terms ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ within the institutional context where the academics worked (see Chapter 4). These documents include resources derived from the academic leadership development programme, the academic staff promotion policy document, and job advertisements. These documents were chosen purposefully because they provide different traces of how The University defined the terms ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ in their official documents. The analysis of these institutional documents is important, I argue, in the sense that it enables us to understand the discursive context within which the institution ‘officially’ recognised, supported, and rewarded particular kinds of leadership while neglecting others.

Following Bakhtin’s (1984) argument about the ongoing tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces, The University, through its institutional documents, may never fully control how academics make sense of, and talk about their leadership. On the other hand, it is naïve to underestimate the material effects of such institutional documents upon academics’ lives, especially when it comes to individuals’ concerns about career promotion and professional development.

50 These institutional documents were accessed through the website of the Human Resources Division of The University. I do not include specific information (such as the website address) in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of my participants.
Navigating multiple meanings of leadership in the academic context

In my reading of the academics’ narratives of leadership, there were differing traces of how these participants defined, negotiated and rejected different meanings of leadership in their talk. The most obvious trace was through their direct responses to my interview question, “in terms of academia, what does leadership mean to you?” These responses were frequently replete with keywords—such as vision, guidance, responsibility, and role model. These are keywords regularly espoused in the literature of effective leadership in HE and beyond (Adair, 1983; Bryman, 2007; Fiedler, 1967). Along this line, I also included implied meanings of leadership when participants talked about their personal and professional lives as part of my analysis.

In combination with the academics’ narratives, I explored what The University defined and counted as leadership in its institutional documents. I explored how these documents produce certain ways of thinking about leadership, and hence consolidate certain discursive practices within the institution. This combined analysis enabled me to understand different meanings of leadership from both the institution’s and academics’ perspectives, as always already embedded within broader discursive fields (such as the current political and economic regimes of NZ).

As a result, I identified at least four overarching meanings of leadership commonly espoused by the academics and their institution. These meanings were ‘leadership as position’, ‘leadership as performance’, ‘leadership as practice’, and ‘leadership as professional role model’. These four meanings of leadership were overlapping but arguably distinguishable, employing distinctive tropes, metaphors, and statements. They are similar to the different ways in which leadership is often defined by scholars and practitioners (Grint, 2005a, see more details in Chapter 2), but they are unique because of their situatedness in this particular academic context. In what follows, I explore each of the four meanings of leadership in academia and examine their constitutive effects within the institution-at-large and on the academics’ identity construction during the interviews.
Leadership as position

The meaning of leadership as position is one of the most prevalent in scholarly literature and institutional policies. Within this meaning, to be a leader (or to be entitled to lead) is to take on a formal role in a headship position. In general, scholars and institutions often use the term ‘leader’ in HE or ‘academic leader’, mostly in a casual way, to refer to any academic who holds a formal headship position in their working context. This implies that academics are generally not leaders until they are given a leadership role within their department or institution.

One example of how The University espoused this particular meaning was evident in the content of the academic leadership development programme offered by the Human Resource Division. On their website, a number of programmes were offered in conjunction with other departments and units within The University (for example, Information Technology Training, Health and Safety Training). The only programme with leadership in the title was the Academic Leadership Development Programme (ALDP) with a weblink to its own information webpage. On the webpage, however, the heading changed to Academic Heads of Department. All information listed on this particular webpage was aimed at Academic Heads of Department and Directors of Centres. An additional document linked to this webpage was a schedule of activities for academic leadership development and the heading made its target audience apparent: “[The University] Academic Leadership Development Programme for Academic Heads of Department and Directors of Centres” [sic]. The webpage also noted “the activities are open to HoDs/Directors (and funded by the university)” (p. 1, emphasis added).

The content from this webpage clearly emphasised that The University only recognised and supported (professionally and financially) the leadership development of academics with headship positions. In this way, The University produced and sustained the notion of who was (and who was not) a legitimate leader, which the institution was willing to recognise and, importantly, invest in. It excluded (and occluded) many academics from accessing the institutional
resource because they were not considered to be leaders within this particular institutional policy.\textsuperscript{51}

Interestingly, the meaning of leadership as position did not come up often in the academics’ narratives in my study. The majority of my participants, who used this particular meaning to make sense of their leadership, to my surprise, were ‘early-career’ academics\textsuperscript{52}. This group of academics often drew on this meaning to talk about their lack of legitimacy to exercise leadership. The first narrative comes from an early-career academic (P1)\textsuperscript{53}. When I asked her whether she considered herself to be a leader, she replied:

In terms of where I am in the hierarchy of a department or the university at the moment, I wouldn’t class myself particularly as a leader because, because of that, because of, because I’m a lecturer in a department that’s quite top heavy. We’ve got a lot of, you know, we’ve got a professor as a head of department, an associate professor, some senior lecturers and so just in the pecking order, being a leader is not necessarily possible because there’re so many of us who might want to do that role. (P1)

For this academic, “being a leader is not necessarily possible” because leadership is associated with “the hierarchy of a department or the university”. Although she did not indicate explicitly, and I did not ask her further, what kind of “role” she actually meant, I assumed in the context of this passage that the “role” was a departmental headship position. In her narrative, she positioned (or “classed”) herself as a lecturer who was at the bottom of the hierarchy of her department. This positioning, in return, made the idea of competing for the “role” with other senior academics in “the pecking order” unintelligible, and perhaps unrealistic,\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51} It is arguable here that all activities offered within this programme were targeted towards academics in headship positions only, and hence not useful for those who did not hold these positions. Yet it is important to note that the activities themselves were created based on the meaning of leadership as position, with no space for alternative meanings of what leadership could be.

\textsuperscript{52} “Early-career academics” in this study, as defined by The University policy, were either 1) on confirmation path and in a five-year probationary period or; 2) on fixed term appointment who had had less than 5 years research experience at any institution either in New Zealand or overseas.

\textsuperscript{53} All participants mentioned in this chapter and following chapters are Pākehā, unless specified as Māori or indigenous.
for her. It is, however, noticeable that she struggled to articulate why she “wouldn’t class [herself] particularly as a leader”. This might suggest that she had not thought through the reason, as it is often the case when meanings become established that individuals tend to take them for granted as ‘the reality’ (Billig, 1987, 2001).

Apart from the early-career academic group, a few academics with formal headship positions also referred to this meaning when talking about their work. In their talk, they often referred to themselves as leaders because of their formal headship positions or they used the term leadership to refer to their official position such as heads of the department or directors of centres. One example comes from a senior academic (P2). He held a formal headship position at the time of our interview. In the following narrative, he talked about the responsibility of his job as a Head of the Department (HoD).

I like the collegial nature of academic decision making. Having said that, at the end of the day, it has to be me that makes certain decisions and it’s me that has to wear the consequences because I am a leader of this department. I certainly don’t say to somebody, what do you think about this and they say, oh, I think you should do that and I do that and it goes wrong and I turn around and say to them, oh, well, you told me to do that. That’s not what you can do at all and I certainly don’t do that because I am a head of this department. It’s my leadership. I have to be a leader who takes responsibility for my own decisions. (P2)

In his narrative, this academic used the terms ‘head’ and ‘leader’ interchangeably. His rationale that he had to “make certain decisions” and “wear the consequences” because he was “a leader of this department”—instead of saying a head of the department—is one example of how ‘leader’ and ‘head’ have the same meaning in his utterance. Within the logic of this utterance, being a head means being a leader by default. Moreover, it is also interesting to note his choice of words, which seemed to indicate the necessity of the way in which he exercised his leadership (“has to be me”, “has to wear consequences”, “have to be a leader”), which could be read in a number of ways. On the one hand, his narrative suggested he believed that the way he exercised his leadership was the only possible way leadership should be exercised. That is, he expected himself to
take sole responsibility for making decisions within his department. In other words, there were no alternatives to how he saw and exercised leadership at work. On the other hand, his narrative may imply that he did not necessarily agree or want to do such thing if he could choose otherwise. Indeed, he was ‘forced’ to exercise leadership this way because it was his responsibility—as a leader—to do so. This speech act, in effect, echoes the image of the ‘ideal’ leader who makes sacrifices for others (see more discussion on this notion in Chapter 6).

Accordingly, the unique subject position constituted through his narrative may enable him to assume an identity as a leader—or to be precise, a sacrificing and responsible leader—as part of his ongoing identities. Yet, the very same discursive resource he drew on may also constrain his capacity and/or desire to think and act otherwise. He may regard alternative practices of leadership\textsuperscript{54} as unintelligible or even impossible in his specific working context. This discursive practice, to a certain extent, may also lead to feelings of stress experienced by many academics in headship positions due to taking sole responsibility in making decisions for others (Gmelch & Burns, 1993) The stress of leadership was also evident, although in different ways, in the narratives of the academics that espoused leadership as performance.

*Leadership as performance*

The second meaning of leadership focuses on an academic’s performance at work. To be a leader, within this meaning, one must demonstrate competency and accomplishment in professional contexts. In this light, individuals’ leadership is constructed in relation to how they perform within the institution and their disciplinary communities. Such a performance can be either official or unofficial, depending on the context in which it is constructed.

An example of how the institution espoused the meaning of leadership as performance comes from The University’s Academic Staff Promotions Policy

\textsuperscript{54} These alternative practices of leadership may include collective/shared/distributed leadership (Bolden et al., 2009; Gosling et al., 2009; Gronn, 2008) and hybrid leadership (Gronn, 2011).
In this document, leadership was predominantly referred to as performance. Throughout this document, The University repeatedly advises that academics should “demonstrate”, “sustain” and “perform” their leadership in order to be considered for promotion. In a more specific way, all academics who apply for promotion “must” be “assessed” and “assign[ed] a performance rating” by the Divisional Committees (p. 32). The ratings include “sustained competence (SC)”, “sustained high competence (SHC)”, “sustained outstanding competence (SOC)” and “sustained outstanding leadership and sustained outstanding competence (SOLC)” (p. 32). Leadership, in this way, is clearly linked with the highest performance level to be assessed.

In my reading, the vocabularies and statements deployed in this document implied that leadership is observable, and more importantly, measurable. The document positions the Division Committees as a group of people who are knowledgeable and entitled to judge individuals’ performance (including what counts as evidence, and what level of performance counts as leadership). At the same time, it positions academics as potential leaders who are responsible for their own performance and achievement. Within the logic of this document, every academic is entitled and encouraged to achieve or aim for “sustained outstanding leadership and sustained outstanding competence (SOLC)” as the highest measure of performance, provided that they can prove their (trust)worthiness to the Division Committees.

Hey (2011) notes that this institutional practice is common under neoliberal policies in which academics are expected to do more second-order labour (such as performance evaluation reports) that often entails less actual academic work. In other words, academics now have to focus their time and energy on figuring out what they have achieved academically and representing it in an auditable form in exchange for recognition and reward from their institution. Ironically, as Butterwick and Dawson (2005) argue, this ‘impression management’ has become counter-productive to academics’ own work and achievements, which contradicts the intentions of neoliberal policies, which is to ostensibly increase research productivity.
The meaning of leadership as performance was often espoused by the academics in my study in relation to their research involvement, publication, and recognition within a wider disciplinary community. A good example comes from a senior academic (P3). Her narrative typifies the way in which the academics drew on this particular meaning to make sense of leadership in their talk. In what follows I asked whether she considered herself as a leader in academia, she replied:

I do consider myself a leader and that’s a sort of competence thing, the sort of performance thing that you have experience and I would say that of me since I’ve done [the national collaborative project], that it made me realise that I actually had stepped up to the mark. We did a good job and so I have the background to say I’m a leader, basically. (P3)

From her narrative, this academic drew on the meaning of leadership as “a sort of competence thing, the sort of performance thing” to explain why she considered herself as a leader. She used past success in her career (the national collaborative project) to provide strong and tangible evidence to support her entitlement to leadership. Her remark, “I actually had stepped up to the mark”, implied there is a certain level of achievement that can assumedly be agreed upon and recognised in public, and she felt entitled to position herself as a legitimate leader within these terms.

Another somewhat contrasting example comes from a senior academic (P4). He drew on similar meaning to talk about the ‘downfall’ of his leadership:

At the moment, I feel that my leadership in research has actually coming down a few pegs because I haven’t been able to get the papers out to support the grant applications in my area and I’ve had a collaboration that hasn’t really been that fruitful, so we’re not going to get any more grants on that at the moment unless we have some breakthroughs and I’m sort of feeling I want to go off in a slightly different direction in my research. So I’m, in terms of research, which has been where I have been a leader, I think, it’s sort of on a plateau at the moment. (P4)
What is noticeable in this narrative is how this academic identified some particular areas of performance as signifying his leadership. These areas include publication, collaboration and research grants. He constructed his current performance as ‘coming down a few pegs’ in contrast to his past performance in which he positioned himself as a leader. This particular meaning of leadership on the one hand entitled him to claim leadership status because of his achievements in the past, but the very same meaning also took that status away from him because he could not sustain his performance at that level. However, the way he constructed his narrative, especially his use of metaphors (“coming down a few pegs”, and “on a plateau”), suggested that his ‘downfall’ in performance did not take away his leadership status completely. In this way, he was still able to hold on to his leadership identity although he seemed to not have a full sense of entitlement to it at the time of our interview.

It is interesting to note the use of metaphors by P3 and P4 in relation to their performances. Whether “step[ping] up to the mark” or “coming down a few pegs”, both spoke as if there were linear steps towards the status of leadership. A sense of pleasure (P3) and anxiety (P4) seemed to be evoked in how these individual academics interpreted their achievements against these steps. This phenomenon is echoed in the literature of HE reporting how many academics feel pressured by their institutions to attain the highest performance, especially in relation to their research profiles (Alexander, 2000; Ashcroft, 2007; Shore, 2008; Sparkes, 2007). Such an institutional expectation generally does not recognise individuals’ personal situations and other relevant factors such as the difficulty of gaining funding for certain research areas or other commitments academics have in their working lives.

**Leadership as practice**

The third meaning of leadership in academia centres on professional practice in everyday contexts. Within this meaning, leadership is regarded as (inter)actions or activities that involve other(s)—including colleagues, students, and team members—who are often positioned as ‘follower(s)’ or ‘junior(s)’ in particular contexts. In this light, it is what academics *practise* with other people, rather
than their formal position or how they achieve their performance, that entitles them to claim their leadership identities. This particular meaning of leadership has also been advocated in the scholarly literature, as an alternative to formal leadership positions, within the movement of distributed leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane & Orlina, 2005). Despite its inclusive interpretation of what leadership is or could be, this particular meaning still begs the question: which kinds of relational practice count as leadership, and which do not?

Within The University, the meaning of leadership as practice is often espoused in a rather ambiguous fashion compared to the other two meanings discussed earlier. One of the institutional documents that best exemplifies this notion can be found in the job advertisements for academic positions. Of the 30 vacancies that I accessed through The University website, there were 21, mostly senior positions, that mentioned the term “leadership” (see more detail in Table 5.1). The most common sentence was “to provide/to offer leadership in...” followed by the specific tasks (such as teaching, supervision, research collaboration, curriculum development, and other professional activities). Such a sentence, although indicating leadership as practice, does not specify what these prospective academics are supposed to do in their everyday contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number of position(s)</th>
<th>Inclusion of the term “leadership” in job description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching fellow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postdoctoral fellow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research fellow</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior lecturer</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor/Headship</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ambiguity of what counts as leadership practice was often taken for granted in these job advertisements. For instance, what counts as leadership in teaching, what does it look like, and how is it different from what academics already do in
terms of their teaching in everyday contexts? These questions are not easily answered, let alone agreed on among practitioners and scholars. This ambiguity of meaning, on the one hand, may enable multiple interpretations for academics to make sense of their leadership practice at work. On the other hand, such a practice may or may not be regarded as leadership by others, especially those who make departmental or institutional decisions. This (mis)understanding can result in material consequences (including departmental/institutional recognition and promotion) for individuals who are expected to ‘provide’ or ‘offer’ leadership in certain ways as part of their job descriptions.

Moreover, what is also noticeable from these advertisements is how The University appears to expect leadership from only certain groups of academics (including senior lecturers and higher positions). Such an expectation (or an absence thereof) may suggest that the institution produces and sustains the institutional discourse that prescribes who is (and who is not) expected to practise leadership. As a result, many academics, especially those who are in early-career positions, may remain overlooked, undervalued and, to some extent, marginalised from being recognised as leaders within their own institution.

Against this discursive background, leadership as practice appeared to be the most prevalent meaning that participants drew on in their talk. Their interpretations of leadership practice ranged from sitting on departmental committees, supervising students, mentoring young colleagues, organising conferences, coordinating research projects, securing grants, overseeing scientific labs, finding resources for students and colleagues, mediating conflicts among students and staff, and so on. These practices are similar to the qualities of intellectual leadership described by Macfarlane (2011, 2012). Although the focus in Macfarlane’s study is full professors, many academics in my study, especially those early- and mid-career, also talked about these qualities as part of their everyday practice at work.

One example comes from a narrative of an early-career academic (P5). Her narrative typified how some of the academics in my study used the meaning of leadership as practice to transgress the prescribed boundary of who is (and who is not) entitled to practise leadership within the institution.
I do believe you don’t have to be the boss to be a leader. You can lead from wherever you are. So even though I’m a junior person, whatever committees I sit on, I still take it really seriously and still see it as leadership because I feel like there are things that I’m meant to be saying and to support the people who are there as well. So even though you’re a new person, you can be the driving force who helps make difference or be the person who puts up the important bits. I mean there are a million different ways to be a leader. (P5)

In this narrative, P5 drew on the meaning of leadership as practice to talk about her own leadership at work. The opening line, “I do believe you don’t have to be the boss to be a leader” in combination with her repeated linguistic device (“So even though I’m a junior person...” and “So even though you’re a new person...”) indicated what Billig (1987, 2002, 2009) calls ‘rhetorical work’. Billig argues that when people talk about their perspectives on any topic, they are also positioning themselves in relation to the topic. In this light, rhetorical work refers to how individuals respond to other perspectives, mostly criticism, challenge or opposition, outside of their immediate interactions (in both imagination or reality). In this case, it suggested that this academic was aware of the prevalent meaning of leadership as position, and she drew on the meaning of leadership as practice to counter it.

For P5, being positioned as ‘junior’ or ‘new’ does not mean that she could not practise leadership in her work. It is what she does that is more important than where she is positioned. The meaning of leadership as practice seemed to enable this academic to construct herself as a leader in a more meaningful way despite the possible absence of formal recognition for her leadership within the institution (as discussed earlier). Her remarks, “You can lead from wherever you are” and “there are a million different ways to be a leader”, implied multiple interpretations available within this particular meaning of leadership. Such a meaning opens up possible ways of thinking and becoming for academics to make sense of themselves, and their ‘leadership’, within discursive fields in and beyond their institution.

Increasingly, within the meaning of leadership as practice, there is also the adoption of a new managerialist language, constituted within neoliberal
discourses (McWilliam, 2007; Middlehurst, 1999, see more discussion in Chapter 2). The majority of academics who drew on this particular discourse were, although not solely, those who had backgrounds working in public and private sectors prior to joining academia. One example is a senior academic (P6) who worked in the private sector for a couple of years before he joined The University. In the next narrative, he talked about the conditions of his academic work and how his leadership was implicated within it:

Within an individual academic, you can think about academics as kind of entrepreneurs in their own sense, in that we're given a lot of autonomy, a lot of freedom for doing whatever we want. We're allowed to develop any kind of line of research that we want. We're allowed, to a certain extent, especially with postgraduate teaching, to structure a course in any way we want. We can choose which kind of service we want to do to the university, to outside groups. So your leadership really relates to setting up your own kind of structure and network within that, gathering appropriate postgraduate students in some kind of lab, relating to things that you're interested in. (P6)

In a similar vein to P5’s narrative, P6 also drew on the meaning of leadership as practice to make sense of his leadership at work. His narrative, however, differs from P5 in the way he was able to talk about his leadership without having to defend his position as P5 did in her narrative. This may suggest the power relations embedded within his social status as a senior academic, which discursively enabled him to assume a position as a legitimate leader.

What is more interesting here is how his interpretation of leadership practice seemed to be shaped by neoliberal discourses with an emphasis on the autonomy, freedom of choice, and self-responsibility of individuals (Davies, 2005). Such discourses work to produce a particular version (or interpretation) of leadership practice that was readily intelligible to this academic. The same discourse, in effect, constituted a subject position of an ‘entrepreneurial leader’ (Hatcher, Meadmore, & Mcwilliam, 1999) that he took up in his talk. More importantly, his narrative also displayed some similarities to how managers in contemporary organisations are encouraged to adopt a new managerialist approach in order to be recognised as legitimate leaders in their work (Deem & Brehony, 2005;
Hatcher et al., 1999; McWilliam, 2002). Such an approach often constructs individuals as self-interested subjects who are responsible for their own success as long as it benefits their organisation.

**Leadership as professional role model**

The fourth meaning of leadership in academia focuses on academics as role models for others (such as their students or younger colleagues). Within this meaning, to be a leader is to lead an exemplary life, a life that others can appreciate and, perhaps, follow. Although the literature of leadership in HE often includes being a role model as part of leadership practice (Macfarlane, 2007b, 2011; Taylor, 1999; Trowler, 1998), I argue here that these two meanings are somewhat different. While leadership as practice focuses on certain professional practices that are interpreted as leadership, leadership as professional role model focuses more on the professional being of academics in their everyday context. The latter meaning implies that the way academics think, talk, and act in their professional lives is supposed to inspire others in academia.

Despite the acknowledgement of how important leadership as role model is, especially for the well-being of HEIs (Bryman, 2007; Macfarlane, 2007b), I found no evidence that The University espoused this particular meaning of leadership within their institutional documents. The lack of evidence suggested The University did not officially recognise and put into practice this particular meaning of leadership, hence its invisibility within the institution. One possible explanation for such an absence might be that it is difficult for the institution to recognise, demand, evaluate, or support this particular meaning of leadership given it is already part of academics’ everyday identities.

In contrast to the lack of institutional recognition of leadership as professional role model, more than half of the academics in my study drew on this particular meaning of leadership in their talk, many of whom constructed themselves as always-already leaders because of their professional identities. One example comes from a senior academic (P7). He told me that he always considered himself as a leader. When I asked him to explain this further, he replied:
For my leadership, I serve as a role model or an example, not that someone has to follow it. But that they can see what I have done. So some of them choose to follow in the same paths as I do. Others decide that’s not for them and they want to do something else. That’s fine with me because my goal is not to make more of me but to allow them to develop fully into what they need to be themselves, to make their own choices. I didn’t follow anyone else’s career. I was allowed to find my own and that’s what I’m allowing others to do as well. So that, in a way, would be a form of leadership. Leadership by getting out of the way and allowing people to find themselves. Not by going in front of them and saying, this is the way. (P7)

In this narrative, this academic constructed his identity as a leader because he was living an academic life, a life that was supposed to be an exemplar for others. During the interview, he told me that he always considered himself as a leader because of his profession as an academic. In this way, being an academic for him means leading others to see how he has lived his working life. This particular meaning of leadership enabled him to make sense of his professional identity as valuable for others to see and, perhaps, to aspire to. It also constituted a subject position of an exemplary leader for him to take up in his talk.

What I also noticed in this narrative was his ‘hands-off’ approach to leadership. For P7, being a role model (and a leader) meant “getting out of the way and allowing people to find themselves”. This approach seemed to resemble some traditional values of academia, such as intellectual autonomy and academic freedom. His ‘hands-off’ approach, in the extreme, implied that academics do not have to do anything but be themselves in order to become leaders. It also suggested, however, that there is no one way to be an academic and, by implication, many ways to be(come) an academic leader.

In a somewhat unusual example, a mid-career academic (P8) talked about being an ‘imperfect’ role model for her students.

I think it’s very wrong of academia, I mean here’s the leadership thing again, to set this ideal model of the academic who does nothing but research because that’s not a healthy way to live and we don’t want our
students to be mentally unhealthy people. We want them to have a balanced life and academia should be possible within a balanced life. So again, I say, you know, here I am, solo mum with kids and an elderly mother and da de da de da, I want my students to see that I’m a pretty normal person, I hope, and yet I can still be an academic, a researcher and a lecturer and I can, even though I’ve suffered depression and all, I can still stand up and do my lecture and, it’s possible, you know. You don’t have to be something perfect to be a good enough leader. (P8)

In this narrative, P8 drew on the meaning of leadership as professional role model to make sense of herself in opposition to an ideal model of the academic, a person “who does nothing but research”. Such an ideal model seems to belong to a performance-based regime where research performance is valued higher than anything else in academia, including NZ universities (Middleton, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Shore, 2010a). Within this regime, regardless of her personal circumstances, P8 might be judged as being a less than ideal academic, hence far from being recognised as a leader. However, in her narrative, she disparaged such ideal academics as “mentally unhealthy people” while explicitly arguing that being a less ideal academic was more suitable for her situation and preferable for her wellbeing. In this light, the meaning of leadership as professional role model enabled her to take up a subject position of an imperfect yet good enough leader, a role model who inspired her students to see how to live a “balanced life”, just like her.

Coexisting meanings of leadership in personal narratives

So far, I have presented the four meanings of leadership espoused by my participants and their institution. I have illustrated how the institution used different meanings to prescribe what counts as leadership in different contexts (professional development, promotion, recruitment), hence embedding certain discursive practices within its institution. I have also examined different ways in which each of the four meanings, viewed as discursive resources, constituted certain kinds of subject positions for academics to take up, and also reject, in their talk.
It is important, however, to re-emphasise the dialogic relations between discursive resources here. Despite presenting the four meanings of leadership in separate sections, individual academics often drew on these different meanings interchangeably throughout the interviews, depending on what they were trying to achieve in their talk. Often, they engaged in ‘rhetorical work’ (Billig, 1987, 2002, 2009) by drawing on the prevalent meanings of leadership espoused within their institution (leadership as position and performance) as a point of contrast to argue for their personal meanings—as I have shown in the cases of P5 and P8. In other words, the dialogic relations (or tensions) between the different meanings of leadership co-constituted unique subject positions for these academics to take up as legitimate leaders in their work.

It is arguable, however, that in many cases my interview questions also invited academics to re-define their meaning of leadership. A good example comes from an early-career academic (P9). When I asked whether she considered herself as a leader in any way, she replied:

P9: I aspire to it. I think that’s probably one of my overarching goals. I’d like to end up in a leadership role but I think some of it depends on how I decide to move forward with my career and the opportunities that are presented to me along the way.

Adisorn: Right. So leadership for you is more as a role?

P9: Yes. I mean I think on a day-to-day basis, we can all have, be, use leadership in our work and I think through research and through participation in communities. We can do that. And I think it can also be, you know, it’s sort of the within and without your job in that you may not want to be a leader at work but you may be in your community, you are for whatever reason. I think a lot about it is recognition within the self of what that is or some understanding of it maybe. I think as a society, we’re becoming, you know, these terms are much more part of the every day and in the news and all of this sort of thing, so I think we understand much more what they are and what their qualities are and how they relate to us, as individuals.
P9’s narrative typified one of many possible ways in which different meanings of leadership were employed by individual academics, illustrating the coexistence of discursive resources in any given contexts. Her articulation of leadership shifted from position to practice, as she moved to a more rhetorical level in her talk. Such a move seemed to enable her to (re)position herself from an aspiring leader to a (more) practical leader. One might notice here, however, that P9’s narrative directly responded to my question, which may only permit certain answers from her. This mirrors the social constructionist understanding that an individual’s narrative is always situated and relational (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1994b). Nonetheless, I argue that my question also prompted her to draw upon the discursive resources continually adopted and adjusted throughout her life. Even though she might not think about the meaning of “leader” and “leadership” in her everyday context, those words might already be part of her discursive resources (Taylor, 2010). Bakhtin calls this the “taste” of word:

All words have the “taste” of a professional, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293)

It is almost impossible to point out precisely which biographical details and broader contexts shape the ways academics made sense of themselves and their leadership. In my study, the academics’ prior professional backgrounds (as in the case of P6) may be one of many factors that shaped the way they made sense of their leadership in different ways. From my reading, these factors may include age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, physical and mental health, academic rank, discipline, prior professional experience, career achievement, and many more. Such factors are always at play with institutional and social discourses in personal narratives despite the fact that some, not all, are more prevalent than others. As a result, the meanings of leadership should be understood as always contested, contextual, temporal and, more importantly, unfinalised.
Becoming a legitimate leader in academia: Who counts as a leader?

The four meanings of leadership I have presented in this chapter highlight the material and discursive effects for individual academics who were positioning themselves and being positioned as (il)legitimate leaders within these discursive resources (Davies, 1989; Davies & Harré, 1990). The first two meanings (leadership as position and performance) underline the hierarchical nature of departmental, institutional and disciplinary community contexts in relation to individuals' leadership. Within these meanings, leadership is understood as official and public recognition of headship positions and individual achievements at work. The University tended to draw on these meanings for recognition, support and rewards for certain groups of academics. These institutional discursive practices seemed to marginalise other individuals and groups of academics who do not ascribe to such categorisations.

The last two meanings (leadership as practice and professional role model) underline the everyday context of HE and are less bounded. They are likely to be found (or espoused) in personal narratives and broader contexts such as scholarly literature and popular media. Such discursive resources emphasise personal recognition and open-ended interpretation of how individuals practise and be(come) a leader in their professional contexts. They are, however, less obvious and difficult to measure, which may explain why The University placed more value on the first two meanings in its institutional documents. Despite the lack of institutional recognition, most academics in this study drew on these last two meanings extensively when talking about their leadership.

This phenomenon might suggest a division between official and personal meanings attributed to leadership within institutions. It reflects the tensions between centripetal (institutional) and centrifugal (personal) forces in academia which enable multiple meanings of leadership to coexist. However, the gap between the institution’s and individuals’ espoused meanings and definitions should not be underestimated or taken for granted because it inevitably affects the way the institution recognises, supports and rewards individuals for their leadership. Such an awareness alerts us to the need for communication between
HEIs and their members in order to recognise multiple meanings of leadership in academia.

In the next chapter, I move to focus on one of the most influential cultural narratives of leadership in contemporary society, namely the heroic narrative. I explore different themes associated with this particular narrative which the academics in my study actively drew on to make sense of, and to talk about, their leadership experiences. In this light, I also examine what might be the constitutive effects of this cultural narrative for individual academics and what it may tell us about contemporary institutional and broader social contexts.
CHAPTER 6

HEROES OF THE ACADEMY

Narratives of heroic leadership

While the rhetoric about leadership has changed at the macro level, the everyday narrative about leadership and leadership practices—the stories people tell about leadership, the mythical legends that get passed on as exemplars of leadership behavior—remains stuck in old images of heroic individualism. (Fletcher, 2004, p. 652)

The heroic narrative is a powerful cultural narrative. It manifests in social media and cultural artefacts, one can read it in academic texts, self-help books, fairytales, contemporary fictions, religious stories or even celebrity biographies. It has multiple forms, taking on various guises, depending on the social and historical context in which it is expressed (Campbell, 1949/2004; Segal, 2000). Campbell (1949/2004), argues that its dominant storyline reflects the universal\(^{55}\) human condition: it is how we face a series of challenges and venture to overcome them. Such a storyline has been tied to the ideas of transformation, progress and courage—all connected to popular images of heroic leaders across contemporary contexts.

Ironically, the very same images of heroic leaders have often been criticised in the leadership literature as detrimental to organisations and societies (Dachler, 2010; Fletcher & Käufer, 2003; Sinclair, 1998, see more discussion on this issue in Chapter 2). These criticisms expose the taken-for-granted association between heroic models of leadership and the discourses of individualism, autonomy and masculinity which are potentially inequitable to structurally oppressed groups (including women, people of different ethnicities and others). In line with these criticisms, there have been ongoing efforts within scholarly communities to

\(^{55}\) Although Campbell’s well-known study focused on myths and stories across cultures and periods of time, his claim of ‘universal’ may still reflect his Western ideologies of individualism and masculinity, which may or may not apply to other cultures.
promote new models, collectively described as post-heroic leadership. These new models, based on relational and collaborative principles, are presented as remedies for the fixation on heroic leadership in Western organisations and societies (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003; Gosling et al., 2009; Gronn, 2010; Hosking, 2011; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Sinclair, 1998, 2007; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Recent studies have shown, nonetheless, that post-heroic models often exist as the rhetoric at the macro level (including scholarly literature and popular media) while heroic understandings of leadership continue to dominate in the everyday narratives of an organisation’s members (Bolden et al., 2009; Fletcher, 2004; Gronn, 2009). The ways in which most people (including academics) make sense of, and talk about, leadership are still very much “stuck in old images of heroic individualism” (Fletcher, 2004, p. 652). Because of that, I am interested in inquiring into this seemingly incongruent phenomenon. But in so doing, I seek neither to denounce the heroic understanding of leadership nor to celebrate post-heroic models, as many leadership scholars do. Instead, I hope to scrutinise the cultural narrative that fuels the ‘cult’ of heroism in leadership (Ford et al., 2008; Gronn, 2006), the narrative that has shaped in part what and how we come to think about leadership as it plays out in everyday practices.

In this chapter, I endeavour to develop understandings of the heroic narrative in relation to the stories academics tell about their leadership. I ask, following Foucault’s (1983) concept of the constitutive nature of power, what happens when academics draw on this heroic narrative, as a discursive resource, to make sense of, and to talk about, their leadership experiences. In what follows, I begin by exploring the heroic narrative and how it has to some extent become symbiotic with our understanding of leadership in contemporary societies. I then explore the different ways in which the academics in my study actively (but also discursively) employed the heroic narrative to construct their leadership accounts. Along this line, I also examine what identities, however temporary, might be produced within a ‘heroic’ narrative construction. I am interested particularly in the constitutive effects of this cultural narrative at both individual and social levels, especially how it renders certain ways of thinking and practice intelligible, and not others.
Exploring the heroic narrative in leadership stories

To say that humans live in a storied world means not only that we incessantly tell stories. Stories are presences that surround us, call for our attention, offer themselves for our adaptation, and have a symbiotic existence with us. Stories need humans in order to be told, and humans need stories in order to represent experiences that remain inchoate until they can be given narrative form. (Frank, 2012, p. 36)

The heroic narrative is one of the three narrative prototypes (along with romantic and sacrificial) that inserts itself in most, if not all, human traditions (Hogan, 2003, 2006). It shapes the way individuals come to think about themselves and the world, mostly unconsciously, in almost every aspect of their lives (Kavanagh & O’Leary, 2004; Mark & Pearson, 2001; Miller, 2000; Oinas, 1979; Pearson, 1991; Pearson, 1998; Segal, 2000). Broadly, the heroic narrative depicts a hero—often a man—who overcomes a series of trials and adversities; upholds social morality; helps other innocent/vulnerable people; protects his home community; and, finally, receives the ‘Holy Grail’ in return for good deeds. (Ford et al., 2008; Hourihan, 1997; Mark & Pearson, 2001; Pearson & Pope, 1981; Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005). Campbell (1949/2004, p. 111), based on his Jungian interpretation of myths, argues that this cultural narrative serves “as a general pattern for men and women, wherever they may stand along the scale”58. In other words, the heroic narrative provides an interpretive framework for individuals to organise their chaotic, unrelated experiences into meaningful stories of a hero—themselves—regardless of the context they speak from.

Building on this understanding, a number of leadership scholars have focused on a heroic archetype in order to explore its symbiotic relationship with certain ways we have come to think about leadership in contemporary societies.

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56 Although this notion is derived from Western society, from my experience in Thailand people also draw on the heroic narrative to make sense of their everyday lives and to construct stories, ranging from national histories to popular fictions.

57 I use the male pronoun here to indicate the gender bias embedded within this cultural narrative.

58 What Campbell (1949/2004) means by ‘the scale’ is a continuum ranging from extreme situations (such as war or natural disaster) to everyday life.
The concept of archetype describes “the collectively experienced expectations, beliefs and feelings of a group of people, which are rarely articulated and sometimes unconscious” (Sinclair, 1998, p. 31). For these scholars, a heroic archetype—often accompanied by images of Anglo-Celtic men—is strongly associated with a socially constructed idea(l) of leader who is physically and emotionally tough, virtuous, rational, and courageous (Kavanagh & O’Leary, 2004; Sinclair, 1998). This association between hero and leader, however, is not representative of private experience or social reality. Instead, the images and stories of archetypal heroes have become dominant in our thinking about leadership because, as Czarniawska (2004a, p. viii) puts it, “they have been institutionalized, repeated through the centuries, and well-rehearsed with different audiences”.

In my reading of participants’ accounts, I recognised that many of their stories about leadership contained extensive reference to the heroic narrative. These stories involved situations and people that either facilitated or hindered their leadership practice and development, how they had achieved as leaders at work, how they had changed as a leader, and most frequently, how they had led others in their everyday contexts. When examining these stories closely, I identified four recurring themes the academics tended to draw on in constructing their leadership stories. These four themes include: overcoming challenges; upholding moral and professional integrity; helping and mentoring others; and serving the community. In what follows, I explore each theme with a particular focus on how it was configured and manifested in the academics’ accounts and what constitutive effects it may have at both individual and social levels.

**Overcoming challenges**

This theme depicts a hero who faces and overcomes a series of challenges. It was evident when the academics talked about critical moments in relation to leadership practices and development, especially as they began to consciously recognise or exercise their leadership at work. In their accounts, many academics often used words that signalled their efforts to overcome challenges such as “try”,...
“deal with” “step up to”, “grow up”, “stick up for” and “put up with”. All suggest a sense of strength, courage and perseverance which are considered crucial to the hero’s journey embedded within the heroic narrative (Hourihan, 1997; Pearson & Pope, 1981; Pearson, 1998; Spielberg, 1993).

What the academics described as ‘challenges’ ranged from difficult tasks and situations (“conducting research”, “coordinating a new course”, “teaching an unfamiliar subject”, “organising a national and international conference and public seminar”, “applying for grants”, “disseminating research publication”, “coordinating an international research project” and “disestablishing a colleague’s job”) to difficult people (‘HoD’, ‘colleagues’, ‘students’, ‘committees’ and ‘community members’). One of the most common narratives is how the academics constructed ‘challenges’ as their trials (Campbell, 1949/2004), or the “catalyst” that enabled them to recognise themselves as, and transform themselves into, a leader. This notion is illustrated in the two following examples:

I’ve been forced into that [leadership] role because other staff members have been on study leave or have just thrown up their hands and said, I’m not going to be involved. So on several key issues, I’ve had to actually stand up and grow up and be the leader and say, hey, you know, this is something we should be doing here or we shouldn’t be doing that. People listened to me. And it really made me realise that I should step up and be a leader when required and that I have something to offer. So that’s been the first real time during my period here as an academic that I have actually felt like I’ve acted like a grown up. (P10, man, early-career academic)

I guess the main catalyst for my leadership is that I’ve been acting head department while [a formal head of department]’s been away and during that time, there have been a number of problems that have come up that I wasn’t given any guidance of how to deal with them before. So I basically had to use my own judgement to deal with them, and it turned out, I did very well. I found I had the capacity within me to get an overview and judge a situation, attain the necessary information and make really good recommendations. (P11, woman, mid-career academic)
What is noticeable about these two narratives is that P10 and P11 associated an act of decision making with an exercise of leadership. Their understanding of leadership seemed to be underpinned by discourses of individualism and autonomy that prevailed in the everyday narrative of leadership (Appelbaum, Audet, & Miller, 2003; Kolb, 1999). Their narratives also signalled similar characteristics of ‘a rite of passage’ narrative—where a ‘young man’ transforms into a ‘real man’—largely fuelled by discourses of masculinity (Ashcraft, 2007). The similar storyline in these two narratives suggested challenges are constructed as a transformational opportunity for individuals, regardless of their gender, to recognise and exercise their leadership. This prevailing storyline has often been used in auto/biographies of ‘established’ leaders as inspirational stories for beginning leaders in order to develop their leadership (Shamir et al., 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). In effect, this particular way of telling enabled both academics to take up a position of a hero who is brave and sensible in their narratives.

In contrast to the ‘transformational’ narratives, a number of academics talked about dilemmas and difficulties in making decisions as being already part of their leadership routines. One academic said, “sometimes you have to make decisions that are not very popular and you have to take account of what other people think and then find the right decision amongst a barrage of criticism that almost certainly won’t be unanimous”. Another remarked, “I often have to make a tough decision in a polarised argument where you’ve got groups hammering at each other”. Although both of them did not mention whether they were always successful in making decisions, their emphasis on “not very popular” and “tough” decisions seemed to highlight the strength of their leadership practice, which in effect constituted themselves in a position of ‘strong hero’, underpinned by the stereotypical masculinity discussed earlier.

In a similar vein, a number of academics seemed to draw on the story of ‘overcoming challenges’ to make sense of, and to talk about, their difficult experiences of leadership. One interesting example comes from a senior academic who had been a HoD for a few years at the time of our interview. When asked

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59 I will discuss the issue of gendered discourses in leadership in the final section of this chapter and also in Chapter 8.
about his experience since he took up this position, he recalled one of his earliest and most challenging experiences:

The first week I was head of department, I had to disestablish somebody's job. It was *pretty clear* that the demand for that job had disappeared because of changes in the way that things worked. Now that was a *pretty awful* thing to do, but the process had already started long before I became head of department. It just so happened because of the timing, that it was my job to talk to the department about it and finally my responsibility to make that decision, and that was *pretty awful*. It's a very hard decision. In fact, possibly the hardest decision I've had to make as head of department, a real baptism of fire. (P12, man, senior academic)

Disestablishing someone's job might be considered brutal, yet this academic carefully constructed his narrative in a particular way that avoided portraying himself as a tyrant. In doing so, his rhetorical move, “it was *pretty clear* that the demand for that job had disappeared”, worked to defend his decision that it was not based on his individual judgment but a long process and an impartial (but obvious) reason *everyone* (including me as his audience) would agree with. He went on to emphasise the situation in which he was forced to carry out this task because of his duty as a HoD. Altogether, with his emphasis on how it was “pretty awful”, this narrative signalled his moral position as a diligent and responsible person who had to make “possibly the hardest decision”. As a result, these discursive resources enabled him to take up a position of a hero who went through a “real baptism of fire”, a masculine hero who bore the pain of having to take a seemingly immoral action as part of the requirements of his leadership position.

**Upholding moral and professional integrity**

The second theme depicts a hero who preserves integrity for the sake of public good. This was often brought up when the academics talked about the importance of their leadership roles in relation to academic and broader contexts. In the interviews, many of my participants associated their leadership with a sense of upholding moral and professional integrity in order to ensure the continuity of
standards, values and good practice within and beyond their academic communities. This theme seems to combine what Macfarlane (2011) identifies as the roles of ‘advocate’ (“being intellectually active and engaged in explaining and promoting key ideas, debating issues and lobbying on behalf of the subject”) and ‘guardian’ (“upholding the principles of good scholarship”) which, he argues, are important qualities of academic leadership (pp. 68-69).

Academics often spoke of this through their everyday routines (“examining masters and PhD theses”, “reviewing grants” and “reviewing and editing journals”) and in relation to specific incidents (“standing against authority”, “confronting abusive colleagues”, “debating over public issues” and “raising concerns about institutional decisions’). These examples varied greatly depending on the context. Yet, they also shared similarities in signalling these academics’ moral and professional responsibilities in and through their heroic actions.

What seemed to underpin academics’ narratives within this theme is how they associated themselves with a particular moral and professional position, a position that enabled them to know what was right and what was wrong. A number of my participants inferred this, as one said, “it’s about knowing what I believe is right and wrong and a very simple way of figuring that out” while another expressed, “you need to be really sure about who you are and what values you have and what will happen if those are compromised. I know what my boundaries are”. These two academics constructed their “knowing” and “be[ing] really sure” about their values as prerequisite knowledge for their moral and professional judgements. What they also shared in common is the way in which they constructed such a ‘prerequisite’ as determined by an individual’s cognitive process rather than by institutional and social processes.

A number of academics talked about their experiences within a department where they were arguing against what they perceived to be ill-judged decisions by their colleagues. One early-career academic recounted her experience of voicing her disagreement at a departmental meeting where most of her colleagues decided to “get rid of” some of the distance courses. She stated, “I argued that I didn’t think that was a good way to go because distance courses can
be very beneficial and, depending on how you teach them, they don’t necessarily take up a lot more time”. She concluded, “so instead of scrapping them, they’ve sort of been put on hold until we figure out what we want to do with them”. Her narrative is similar to that of another senior academic who recalled his early experience of arguing against the way in which a particular course structure excluded some students from doing certain courses. He remarked, “It was quite a complicated argument because you’re trying to persuade people about something even though I was, at the time, the most junior member of the department. But the interesting thing is that people listened to me with respect”. Both academics constructed their narratives in ways that emphasised their solitary position against the majority of their colleagues. Their subject positions were constituted, in part, through their heroic victories. It is also interesting to note that both academics were early-career at the time of these incidents which might help intensify the significance of their actions giving greater effect to their heroic courage.

In a similar vein, a mid-career, Māori academic talked about his particular leadership experience within the institution. In the following extract, he responds to my question about whether he noticed any differences or changes in how he had exercised his leadership since he started his career in academia:

I’m probably getting more confident with myself now so I may not take maybe the general Māori perspective. I’m prepared to question that. Like, in terms of PBRF, our Māori students coming through and completing, like a PhD or a Masters, there’s more money attached to them. The university gets more money when they get completed and I don’t like that. I don’t understand that because our Māori students don’t get anything extra or different, and their supervisors don’t get anything extra or different for supervising them. So that’s something that I’ve been a bit vocal in querying around and so on. I think a lot of other Māori academic staff may not necessarily see that as an issue but I am. So I suppose that’s just an example of where I’m becoming a lot more confident in my own views and willing to put forward a perspective that may not necessarily align with the rest. (P13, man, mid-career academic)
From my reading of this narrative, it suggested that P13 positioned himself somewhere outside of the majority of his Māori colleagues (and possibly people in his community). He was confident enough to question the general Māori perspective because he could see an issue that a lot of his Māori colleagues “may not necessarily see”. This narrative seemed to position him as a quasi-outsider who was able to see beyond current conventional thinking. This helped emphasise his courage in standing up for what he believes in even if it might appear to be contrary to the interests of his own community. Altogether, his narrative enabled him to position himself as a hero who was confident in his views and had the courage and integrity to speak out.

Apart from upholding professional standards and moral values within their institutional contexts, a number of participants also recounted similar experiences outside their institution. In the following narrative, a senior academic spoke about her leadership experience of sitting on a national committee:

I continue with leadership actions and roles outside of the school but within my profession and have done that recently with regard to national education programme that has been a part of a movement, if you like, a change in policy at a nationwide level and in sort of an academic scholarship role at the national level, taking a stand about a serious issue of national importance that sort of one or two on the committee were trying to change that I thought was the wrong move, and kind of forced them to stop, take stock, consult more widely, think through what the risks and the benefits are. (P14, woman, senior academic)

In P14’s narrative, it is noticeable how she constructed the event as one where she exercised her leadership in a special way. Her repeated use of words “national” (“national education programme”, “at a nationwide level”, “at the national level” and “national importance”) suggested that she wanted to emphasise that the situation is more important than other ordinary situations. Although she did not elaborate, and I did not ask her further in that moment, how she “kind of” forced them to stop “the wrong move”, her narrative implied that she was the person who intervened in the process (which, without her intervention, might have been the wrong move “at a nationwide level”). Such a
narrative enabled her to take up a heroic position by standing against an illjudged decision—a hero(ine) who was also participative (“consult more widely”) and perceptive (“think through what the risks and the benefits are”) in her actions.

Social constructionist scholars argue that individuals’ values as well as their realities and rationalities are always constituted within, and are artefacts of particular historical, social and cultural contexts (Gergen, 1994b, 2009a, 2011; Harré, 1986; Shotter, 1993b). In this light, what academics value and perceive as boundaries for their judgements may also be understood as a reflection of what is deemed appropriate and intelligible in their working contexts at this moment in time. Thus, it is important to note academics’ practices of ‘upholding moral and professional integrity’ may be considered heroic in one context but not in another. This notion was often taken for granted by the academics in my study when they talked about certain moral and/or professional standards as if they were universally accepted.

**Helping and mentoring others**

The third theme depicts a hero who helps others to develop. It was the most frequent theme the academics drew on to talk about their leadership experiences at work. This finding is similar to what Macfarlane (2011) reports in his study where university professors tended to consider ‘helping other colleagues to develop’ as the most important role for their leadership, and also as part of being ‘a good academic citizen’ (Macfarlane, 2005, 2007a, 2007b). In my participants’ accounts, the words that seemed to signal the notion of helping and mentoring others included “help”, “develop”, “encourage”, “facilitate”, “provide”, “advise”, “guide”, “mentor”, “motivate” and “nurture”. These words are arguably underpinned by the value of pastoral practice which, as Bryman (2007) asserts, is one of the most dominant principles of leadership in HE.

The academics I interviewed often identified their ‘helping’ activities in relation to students and younger colleagues. These activities included: “supervising them on their research”, “finding out what their strengths are”, “helping them develop
their potential”, “helping them to figure out how to achieve their goals”, “showing them how to move up with the university system”, “helping them apply for new research grants”, “encouraging them to publish”, and “trying to help them obtain resources, knowledge and skills”. These examples suggest academics actively engaging in activities that are based on altruistic motivation and concern for others’ interests (Allen, 2003; Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1996).

Within this theme, some academics constructed their act of ‘altruism’ in opposition, or even as an obstruction, to doing their individual work. This notion is expressed, although quite differently, in the following narratives:

It takes a lot of time and effort to lead your own [research] and, in fact, leadership [of research] takes a tremendous amount of energy and time and commitment. I’ve been putting most of that into others. So, in a way, I am leading them towards becoming leaders themselves. I’m trying to help them develop. Instead of focusing on my own research, I’m focusing on theirs. That’s a decision that I’ve actually made a number of years back. Instead of trying to do my own research, I’m trying to help them do theirs. I’ve established myself in my career. So my move was to not do that much of my own research anymore. (P15, man, senior academic)

I was a bit frustrated with my own research in that I’ve got sort of sidetracked by helping other people with their research. I just can’t help that. I know I haven’t stayed true to my own vision even though I believe that to be the core of leadership, I’ve kind of neglected my own research profile and my career. (P16, woman, mid-career academic)

These two narratives illustrate how ‘helping others’ seemed to require these academics to give up or neglect their own research practice. For P15, “helping [his students] to develop” instead of “trying to do [his] own research” was his choice. His narrative suggested it was an act of sacrifice which is considered more risky, and more heroic, than an act of altruism (Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011). This narrative enabled him to take up a position of a hero who is willing to sacrifice his own interest for the benefit of others. In contrast, P16 constructed her narrative of ‘helping others’ as a mistake or a failure to “stay true to [her] own vision”. From my reading of her narrative, I noticed that she was torn
between ‘helping others’ and her own ‘research profile’ which resulted in her feeling “a bit frustrated”. What interests me here is how she drew on the narrative of ‘helping others’ to help explain, or indeed remedy, her “neglected” research profile. In this way, instead of being constituted as a failed leader, the narrative of ‘helping others’ seemed to enable her take up a position of a sacrificing hero who “just can’t help” helping others despite an awareness that it may distract her from pursuing her own academic career.

It is important, however, to note that P15 considered himself an ‘established’ academic while P16 was mid-career. Their career positions may shape how they made sense of ‘helping others’. For instance, it is likely that academics in mid-career positions like P16 will expect themselves, and be expected by their institution, to continue developing their research profile while senior academics like P15 may expect themselves to do more mentoring work with younger colleagues and students. Nevertheless, as Macfarlane’s (2011) study demonstrates, often what senior academics perceive as important for their leadership (“helping other colleagues to develop”) may contrast with what universities, under neoliberal regimes, expect them to do (“leadership in research”). For that matter, universities tend to encourage senior academics to engage their time more with research activities rather than mentoring younger colleagues and students because the latter does not directly produce incomes for institutions.

Although P15 and P16 did not explicitly mention the benefits of helping their students and colleagues, it can be argued that there might be some returns on their ‘sacrificial’ acts. This is evident in a number of my participants’ narratives as they talked about the reciprocal relationships they had with their students:

I like mentoring students because I get a lot out of it too. I learn so much from them. To me, it’s very much a reciprocal relationship in that I hope that they get something from me but I certainly get a lot from them because when they’re doing a literature review, I get how they’re thinking and they spark new ideas from me which gets me inspired and motivated. When it comes down to doing research, it’s giving me new perspectives on both doing the research and analysing. (P17, woman, early-career academic)
P17's narrative suggested she received intellectual benefits from mentoring her students, which is echoed in the literature on mentoring, especially about the expectations and assumptions of different groups of mentors (Healy & Welchert, 1990; Jacobi, 1991; Johnson, 2007; Ragins, 1997). Her construction of ‘mentoring’ showed signs of humility (“I hope that they get something from me but I certainly get a lot from them”) and this was a common sentiment expressed by academics in my study.

In a similar vein, some participants also talked about the benefits they gained from mentoring, noting a sense of pride and emotional satisfaction:

Many of my students have developed their skills, their abilities, their ideas, their theories to the point where they are viable and they say they wouldn’t have done that without me. (P18, man, senior academic)

Just watching [my student] grow as a person through confidence or ability as well as knowing that I could help facilitate that was a huge positive for me. (P19, woman, early-career academic)

The ways P18 and P19 constructed their narratives suggested that there was a correlation between their mentoring and the results achieved by those they had mentored (“they wouldn’t have done that without me” and “knowing that I could help facilitate that”). These comments seemed to fail to take into account other factors that may have affected their students’ or colleagues’ achievements. Moreover, what largely remains taken-for-granted about the narrative of ‘helping and mentoring others’ is that it often positions people who are led by the ‘leader’ as less developed, less experienced, and perhaps more vulnerable. It therefore enables the narrator to take up a position of a hero who is already developed and knows better than those she or he leads.

**Serving the community**

The fourth theme depicts a hero who acts for the benefit of her/his whole community. It is similar to the theme of ‘helping and mentoring others’ yet the focus is on a whole community rather than individuals. Academics who drew on
this theme often constructed themselves as members of particular communities where they served. These communities included those defined by academia, discipline, institution, department, gender, ethnicity, and groups of people with (dis)abilities. In their accounts, they often used words such as “represent”, “serve”, “support”, “contribute” and “improve” to indicate their leadership practice with and for their communities. Many of them called it ‘leadership of service’.

What these academics often referred to as services to their communities included: “organising conferences and managing of academic associations”, “sitting on a committee in the department”, “giving public talks to promote the discipline”, “inspiring young women coming through the university that they can do it”, “being a role model for young people in the community”, “getting more equal representation through the university ranks”, “bringing cultural awareness to the public” and “conducting research for my community and my people”. Although these services may seem different in their focus in terms of practice and context, what they share in common is a sense of belonging, commitment and contribution.

Similar to ‘helping and mentoring others’, the academics often constructed their accounts of ‘serving the community’ with an emphasis on ‘altruism’. One academic explained the importance of serving her department was: “because you do need to put people forward and you do need to put people’s needs ahead of your own, on some occasions for the betterment of a department”. Another remarked: “I try and contribute as much as I could to my department. It’s just something that you’ve got to give that these things have to go on. You don’t necessarily get paid for them, but it’s just to be an active member of the department”. Both these academics took up similar positions of dedicated members of their departments. Their emphases on “put[ting] people’s needs ahead of your own” and “you don’t necessarily get paid for them” also worked to intensify a moral stance, which in effect constituted a position of a selfless community hero as a significant aspect of their academic identities.

In contrast to these two academics’ statements of the ideal, a number of others mentioned the ‘reality’ of ‘serving the community’, which often entailed sitting on
more committees than some of their colleagues because of their eagerness to take on this service role. As one academic pointed out, “the university encourages us to do community service. As with anything else in life, some respond and some don’t”. What follows is a narrative from an academic who ‘responded’:

I tend to discover that once you sit on a committee in this university, if you don’t balls it up, they’ll invite you back to other committees and then other committees. We’ve got a joke, like, if you’ve shown any sort of competence or any sort of leadership or efficiency in doing something in a committee, you tend to get called back. So it’s your own punishment. Glory has its own reward. (P20, woman, early-career academic)

From this narrative, ‘serving the community’ can become “your own punishment”. Although P20 did not explicitly state what “punishment” meant for her, I assume it was related to the time consuming nature of sitting on a committee, which may constrain her from doing other work. It is also interesting to notice the use of humour and sarcasm, as discursive resources, in her narrative. Her phrase, “We’ve got a joke”, enabled her to hint at how competent and efficient she was in a committee (since she was one of those who “tend to get called back”) without coming across as arrogant. As her final remark suggested, despite the ‘punishment’ of having to do more work in ‘serving the community’, she did not show any sign of wanting to retreat from it. This narrative may be read as signalling her commitment to the (institutional) community—a common gesture of heroic devotion.

Apart from serving the academic community, most of the women participants who participated in my study also talked about serving a community of academic women within The University. Many of them mentioned the issue of gender inequality in academia, especially the issue of women’s underrepresentation in leadership positions. One senior academic said: “I come from where women never got professorships” which is similar to what her early-career colleague stated: “Coming from [my discipline] which, although it’s catching up in terms of male/female ratios, it’s still very male dominated. Look at stats from Australia and see that five years ago, there were more women running universities than there are today”. These statements can be read as helping these women academics rationalise their commitment to serving and representing other
women within academic communities and wider society. The following narrative provides another example of how women academics constructed their narratives of ‘serving the community’:

I’ve become a committee member of [the women’s committee] and I also was elected as a member of [one of the institutional councils], and those are two of my sort of big service thing that I’m really pleased I’m involved with because gender equity in universities is an important issue for me. So I’m really glad to be involved in that even if it’s only in a tiny way and it’s not necessarily about radically changing the university but it’s being involved in a group that is concerned in making opportunities available for both general and academic women. (P21, woman, mid-career academic)

From this narrative, P21 constructed her involvement in two institutional committees in positive terms (“I’m really pleased” and “I’m really glad”). Her remark, “gender equity in universities is an important issue for me”, implies that it might not necessarily be important for others. Because of that, her narrative seemed to invoke a moral discourse of ‘making a difference’, which Moisander and Pesonen (2002) describe as “doing small but significant good deeds and making sacrifices, independently of what other people may do or think” (p. 333). This particular discourse is common among the accounts of academic women about their services to other academic women. By drawing on this discourse in their narratives, it enabled these academics to take up a position of a hero(ine) who made a difference for their women colleagues, and the academic community as a whole.

In a similar vein, all participants who identified themselves as Māori or Pasifika also talked about serving their ethnic and local communities. For these academics, serving their communities was often constructed as the most crucial part of their everyday lives in academia. Their use of words ‘responsibility’ and ‘obligation’ were present and explicit throughout their talk. For example:

There’s quite a strong sense of responsibility in terms of how I conduct myself, particularly in the New Zealand environment and particularly within a Māori environment. There’s a lot of pressure there around. People know who you are and other sort of connections there and so you have to
be very careful. It’s a huge responsibility, I suppose and what you say can have sort of more ramifications for your wider family and that’s always really important. (P22, man, mid-career academic)

From this narrative, P22 constructed himself as being responsible for not only his local community but also a wider Māori community. His sense of ‘responsibility and obligation to the community’ seems to be common among indigenous academics (Fitzgerald, 2003; Hoskins, Martin, & Humphries, 2011). His repeated emphasis on “responsibility” conveyed the significance of taking up a moral position within the Māori community somewhat akin to a community hero who takes on the weight of responsibility for his people. However, his narrative might also be read as suggesting the normative expectation within his community where every member takes responsibility and no one gains special status as a hero by doing that.

It is important to note here, however, that I do not suggest all academics who identify themselves as Māori, or in terms of other indigenous identities, always have a sense of obligation to serve their communities. A number of my participants mentioned that some of their colleagues with indigenous backgrounds were not interested in working with their ethnic communities. As one noted, “they are working away from their own people and they don’t have those same pressures”.

Within the theme of ‘serving the community’, it is noticeable that both women and indigenous academics (and those who occupy both positions) are often expected to serve their identified communities, yet similar expectations are presumably not made of their male and/or Pākehā colleagues. A number of leadership scholars highlight this issue as one of many examples of gender and ethnic/racial inequity within educational institutions (Blackmore, 1999; Blackmore & Sachs, 2000; Essed, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2006). These scholars note that many women and indigenous academics still face inequity because their community services are still located within ‘white-male dominant’ systems, the
systems that tend to not recognise such community service as important for the institution\(^{60}\).

**Becoming a heroic leader in academia: Potential or pitfall?**

The four themes I have presented thus far highlight different ways in which the academics in my study commonly talked about their leadership experiences in academia. These themes resonate with the main storyline of the heroic narrative, depicting a heroic leader who is ‘overcoming challenges’, ‘upholding moral and professional integrity’, ‘helping and mentoring others’, and ‘serving the community’. Within each theme, I have examined the constitutive effects of the heroic narrative, focusing on how it constructed certain subject positions for academics to take up as part of their identities.

From my analysis, the academics’ self-narratives within the first two themes (‘overcoming challenges’ and ‘upholding moral and professional integrity’) seemed to contain extensive reference to the heroic narrative underpinned by the discourses of ‘individualism’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘masculinity’. The dialogic relations between these discourses co-constitute a subject position of what I call a ‘hegemonic hero’, a hero who is independent, ambitious, self-determined, strong, assertive, righteous, competitive and courageous. For example, in their talk about ‘overcoming challenges’, many academics associated their leadership with ‘making difficult decisions’, which required them to ‘step up’ and ‘toughen’ themselves in order to face and overcome ‘challenging’ situations. This heroic position seemed to govern these academics’ thinking that the only way to be (considered) a leader is to act like a hero who is strong, assertive and courageous; being otherwise (gentle, quiet, emotional) does not appear to make sense. This binary thinking constructs certain qualities of leadership as appropriate while

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\(^{60}\) It is important to note here, however, that The University where I conducted my study has recently implemented a new institutional policy that recognises academics’ service to communities inside or outside the institution as part of the ‘measurement’ for academic staff promotion. Despite the purported recognition of community service, especially for Māori academics, this policy only counts if academics are managers or representatives within these communities, and can provide evidence to account for this. This suggests that the institution continues to privilege the meanings of leadership as position and performance, which are more concrete and measurable, as discussed in Chapter 5.
positioning others as unintelligible. As a result, a number of academics, men and women, who do not (and perhaps, cannot) take up a subject position of a hegemonic hero may be undermined and marginalised from being recognised as leaders in particular contexts within their institution (Appelbaum et al., 2003; Calás & Smircich, 1999, 2006; Marshall, 1995; Oseen, 1997; Sinclair, 1998, see more discussion on gender issue in Chapter 8).

Unlike the first two themes, my analysis of the last two themes (‘helping and mentoring others’ and ‘serving the community’) suggested the heroic narrative my participants also drew on was complemented by less dominant discourses including, but not limited to, ‘pastoral care’, ‘relational building’, ‘collectivism’ and ‘making a difference’. These discourses are sometimes categorised under the discourses of post-heroic leadership (discussed in Chapter 2). The dialogic relations between the heroic narrative and these discourses co-constitute a subject position that I call an ‘altruistic hero’, a hero who is compassionate, self-less, caring, sensitive, modest, collaborative and socially just. Taking up this subject position enabled (but also constrained) these academics to practise their leadership for the benefits of others rather than themselves.

Broadly, the subject position of the ‘altruistic hero’ enabled these academics to make sense of their leadership experiences as meaningful not only to themselves but to others. They could take a stance for their identified community, develop their younger colleagues and students, and raise concerns for marginalised groups within the institution as part of their leadership practices. However, taking up this subject position also constrained these academics in a number of ways. For example, a number of academics acknowledged that by committing a lot of time to helping other colleagues and students, they may be neglecting their own career development. As well, a number of them reported feeling overwhelmed by the obligation they had to their own communities. This notion is echoed in a study where minority academics reported feeling weary from responsibilities and accountability placed on them from both the institution and their community (Fitzgerald, 2006). Such an understanding highlights the need for the institution to recognise and support those academics who consider an ‘altruistic hero’ position as part of their leadership identities.
From my analysis, the subject positions of ‘hegemonic hero’ and ‘altruistic hero’ seemed to always coexist as opposing forces within the context of HE. The ‘hegemonic hero’ position, as a centripetal force, has been dominant in contemporary societies with its emphases on individual achievements, righteousness, and confidence. The ‘altruistic hero’ position, as a centrifugal force, provides other ways of knowing and thinking about leadership that are more people and community oriented. By presenting the ‘hegemonic hero’ and ‘altruistic hero’ as somewhat oppositional, I do not suggest academics can only take up one of these subject positions. Instead, individual academics should be understood as polyglots who may espouse different, and perhaps contradictory values (Gergen & Gergen, 2010a) in relation to their leadership understandings and practices. At one time, these academics may take up a position of ‘hegemonic hero’, recalling the moment when they had to make tough decisions or showing pride in winning national research grants; at another, they may take up a position of ‘altruistic hero’, talking passionately about mentoring their students to reach their goals or committing themselves to represent other members of their community. Their identities, following this understanding, are continuously (re)constituted by their respective positionings (Davies & Harré, 1990) and their social locations (Sampson, 1989). They are multiple, contradictory, never fully coherent, and never fully finalised.

By interpreting how the heroic narrative prevailed in my participants’ accounts, I do not suggest that all of them consciously perceive themselves as heroic leaders. I argue, however, that all individuals, including me, are embedded in a discursive network of power relations where the heroic narrative continues to govern and bind us to certain ways of thinking about leadership (Sinclair, 1998, 2007). It is thus difficult for them, and me as their audience, to avoid thinking and talking about leadership without drawing on the heroic narrative. In this light, I argue that focusing on the constitutive effects of the heroic narrative may enable us to understand the power and persistence of the heroic images and stories of leaders that continue to prevail in organisations and societies. To recognise how the heroic narrative is complex and contradictory—how it can facilitate potential as well as act as a pitfall—may help us move beyond a rigid dichotomy between heroic and post-heroic leadership.
Focusing on the heroic narrative also enables us to gain insights into the working environment where individual academics practise their leadership. Reading through the interview accounts, I noticed that some of participants accepted current neoliberal conditions as the ‘background’ of their heroic ‘challenges’ (such as P16) while another perceived it as a ‘dragon’ that intruded upon their community (such as P13). For the former, the ‘challenges’ were to become more productive and efficient within limited time and resources, while for the latter the neoliberal agendas were the ‘challenges’ they needed to fight against. Whether accepting and/or fighting against it, neoliberalism seems to have already become an invisible yet powerful ‘dragon’ that governs academics’ lives despite their attempts at resistance (Davies, 2005).

Accordingly, a number of my participants reported feeling stressed at work (“this whole thing just drives me crazy”; “I can’t remember when was the last time I had a break”; “I often panic about my work”). This could be the result of the continuing challenges and pressures to perform instigated by their institution. These challenges include, among others, “getting publications out”, “securing external grants”, and most recently “raising a PBRF score”. In this light, they were expected not only to demonstrate but also to sustain their leadership performance throughout their career (see Chapter 5 for a discussion on leadership as performance). Indeed, a number of academics expressed a feeling of ‘stuckness’ in which the (happy) ending promised by the heroic narrative seems ever more distant (Gill, 2010). At the end, to borrow from Greek mythology, for many hopeful academics the search for the ‘Holy Grail’ has turned itself into a neoliberal ‘labyrinth’ where the weakest persons will be eaten up by the institutional ‘Minotaur’.

In the next chapter, I focus on the notion of ‘effective leadership’, one of the most taken-for-granted concepts in contemporary leadership literature. I examine different ways in which the academics in my study constructed themselves and others as in/effective leaders in their narratives and what might be the constitutive effects of these discursive practices.
CHAPTER 7

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE IDOL
Narratives of effective leadership

[Despite burgeoning discussion and debate, the nature of leadership remains elusive. Some would have it otherwise: much of the current discourse implies either that the holy grail of effective leadership practice is within our grasp or at least that the search for it is not in vain. (Simkins, 2005, p. 10)]

Who is a good leader? What makes them effective? What qualities are they assumed to have? Are there certain traits that leaders possess? What behaviours are they supposed to demonstrate? These long-standing questions have preoccupied leadership scholars for decades (Carroll et al., 2008; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Underpinning these questions are assumptions that effective leadership is necessary for organisations and societies, that it is possible to distinguish ‘effective’ leadership from ‘ineffective’ leadership (or ‘appropriate’ from ‘inappropriate’, ‘good’ from ‘bad’), and that ‘effective’ leadership can be “identified, prescribed and replicated” (Simkins, 2005, p. 10). The first and, perhaps, most taken-for-granted assumption is that leadership is indispensible for successful organisations as it will improve and sustain individual and collective performance (Fairhurst, 2007; O’Reilly & Reed, 2011). Such an assumption, largely fuelled by management discourses, has led to countless models and theories of effective leadership competing for dominance in organisations, including HEIs (see Chapter 2 for discussion on dominant approaches to leadership).

In the context of HE, most studies concerned with effective leadership tend to focus on departmental and institutional leadership (but also see, for different

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\[61\] In this chapter, I use the term ‘appropriate’ interchangeably with ‘effective’. Although I recognise their differences in meanings and functions, much of the scholarly literature I have drawn on uses these two terms interchangeably, as did my participants.
types of leadership, Bolden et al., 2012; Macfarlane, 2011, 2012; Macfarlane & Chan, 2012). Leadership scholars have predominantly investigated what leader traits, qualities and behaviours are associated with departmental and institutional effectiveness. Unsurprisingly, they have reported a palette of attributes, which appear to be generic across organisations such as having a clear vision, being fair, people skills, and creating a collegial environment. There are, however, a number of attributes that are specific to HE contexts including scholarly credibility, acting as an academic role model, understanding academic processes, and protecting academic freedom and autonomy (see Boer, Goedegebuure, & Meek, 2010; Bryman, 2007; Kekäle, 1999; Mitchell, 1987; Pounder, 2001; Smith, 2005; Spendlove, 2007; Stout-Stewart, 2005; Turnbull & Edwards, 2005).

Against this generic background, a number of scholars have begun to question the concept of effective leadership, also known as leadership competency, and the assumptions it takes for granted (see Bolden & Gosling, 2006; Buckingham, 2001; Simkins, 2005; Wallace, 2001). One of the common criticisms is that what ‘works’ as effective leadership in one context may not work in another, in different situations, tasks, and with different individuals (Bolden & Gosling, 2006; Bryman, 2007). And, more importantly, the idea of effectiveness depends very much on how individuals interpret it, as one’s “criterion for judging effectiveness may be another’s criterion for judging ineffectiveness” (Wallace, 2001, p. 30). Indeed, these criticisms remind us of the complex, elusive and discursive nature of leadership which is rarely attended to in the mainstream ‘leadership in HE’ literature.

In this chapter, I depart from the approach taken in many of the recent studies concerned with effective leadership. Instead of considering what makes effective leaders in academia, I ask, what makes it possible for the academics in my study to construct themselves and others as in/effective (or in/appropriate) leaders in their narratives? I begin by exploring some of the dominant discursive resources around in/effective leadership which constitute ‘common sense’ about leadership in everyday lives (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Then, I focus on the particular narratives of four academics, examining the ways in which they draw on multiple discursive resources to construct versions of themselves and others
as particular kinds of (in/effective) leaders. In so doing, I also analyse how these academics’ discursive practices constitute their multiple identities as well as their ways of being in academia.

**Exploring discursive resources of in/effective leadership**

Through my reading across the interview data, I identified several discursive resources, which the academics drew on in their narratives of leadership effectiveness. These discursive resources encompass tropes, terms, and images that render certain ways of thinking and practice of leadership appropriate, and not others. Some of these resources are associated with dominant discourses of leadership including leader traits, behavioural styles, situational contingency, transformational and charismatic leadership, and post-heroic leadership (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b; Bolden et al., 2011; Ford, 2005; Yukl, 2010, also see more discussion about these approaches in Chapter 2). And some resources are more local and usually tied to the narrower contexts of individuals’ personal lives (such as family culture, education and professional training, and workplace environment). Dominant resources are often shaped and complemented by alternative or personal resources, constituting unique subject positions for individuals to take up or resist as part of their identities (Taylor, 2005, 2011).

Yukl (1999b) points out that most of the dominant discourses of leadership were conceived using a ‘two-factor’ conception to distinguish leadership effectiveness from ineffectiveness. Within this conception, two traits, qualities or behaviours are constructed as in opposition to one another. Examples of these include people-oriented versus task-oriented leadership, participative versus authoritarian leadership, transformational versus transactional leadership, charismatic versus non-charismatic leadership, and more recently, heroic versus post-heroic leadership. Certainly, the dichotomies within these discourses have historically and socially positioned individuals who possess or demonstrate certain traits, qualities or behaviours as ‘good’, ‘effective’, or ‘appropriate’, and others who do not, as ‘bad’, ‘ineffective’, or ‘inappropriate’ leaders. A number of leadership scholars have noted, however, that these dichotomies within the discourses of leadership tend to oversimplify the complexities of the leadership
process as well as reinforce stereotypes of particular leaders (Alvesson, 2011; Bensimon et al., 1989; Bolden et al., 2011; Carroll et al., 2008; Yukl, 1999b, 2010). Despite these criticisms, the dichotomous way of thinking about in/effective leadership has continued to shape in part how we make sense of leadership in our everyday lives (Bolden et al., 2011). This understanding was also evident in the academics' narratives.

In my reading across the interview data, participants often took either side of the dichotomies when making sense of themselves and others as particular kinds of (in/effective) leaders. For example, a large number of them described themselves as a ‘people-person’ kind of leader and critiqued others who they considered to be ‘authoritarian’. A few called themselves ‘task-oriented’ and positioned their colleagues’ leadership as ineffective for spending (and wasting) too much time trying to please everybody in their departments. Some academics described their bosses as ‘charismatic’ and considered themselves more ‘quiet’ leaders. A few academics called themselves ‘entrepreneurial’ leaders and criticised ‘micro-managers’. Some thought being ‘firm’ and ‘tough’ is necessary for their staff and students while a few insisted on being ‘participative’ because it better suits the academic environment. My interest in this chapter, however, is not focused on what traits, qualities or behaviours of leadership were considered in/effective in academia or whether academics’ constructions about themselves and others actually reflected a ‘reality’. Rather, I want to explore what makes it possible for these academics to construct themselves and others as certain kinds of in/effective leaders.

In what follows, I have chosen to focus on the extended narratives of four academics, partly because they highlight competing discursive resources and different subject positions around in/effective leadership, and partly because they illustrate four distinct ways that academics have engaged in an ongoing process of identity construction in their talk (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626). As I stated in Chapter 4, these narratives are by no means intended to represent the academics’ ‘real’ lives. Instead, they offer ‘snapshots’ of their experiences, memories, and fantasies about in/effective leadership in academia.
The four snapshots

Participant A

The first two extracts are taken from the interview account of a senior academic I refer to as Participant A (PA). In extract 1, PA shared his thoughts about some leadership issues at work.

Extract 1

PA: We’ve got a current dean, he’s a much more management style, like he’s really interested in kind of management studies, and sort of reads books about management and stuff, and he’s quite an authoritarian person, just naturally. He’s inclined to be quite authoritarian and so I just feel like sometimes, he was trying to run the place as though it was like a business. He sees that getting the task done and getting people to obey the rules and stuff is worth a sacrifice in terms of how people get on with each other whereas I think if people get on with each other, you get much better outcomes in the long term. So one of the main complaints people make about him is that nobody feels valued, that people don’t feel that he cares about whether they’re there or not, but again it comes back to his natural inclination, that is not to ever say, you’ve done a good job, whereas I think my natural inclination is to say, you’ve done a good job.

As there are many possible ways to read this extract (and the other extracts which follow), I will focus on what seems most relevant to the question I asked earlier: what makes it possible for the academics to construct themselves and others as in/effective (or in/appropriate) leaders in their narratives. In this extract, PA positioned himself differently to his boss, who he constructed here as an ‘ineffective’ leader. My reading of his narrative suggested that he drew on a number of discursive resources to render his narrative construction of his boss (and himself) intelligible. These discursive resources included the notion that ‘management is bad leadership’ and a distinction between ‘task-oriented’ and ‘people-oriented’ styles, among others. Although I explore these two resources in a separate and linear fashion, they were clearly interwoven within this narrative.
Examining the opening of this extract, I suggested that PA drew on a popular notion that an over-emphasis on ‘management’ represents ‘bad leadership’ to construct his boss as a particular kind of ineffective leader. This notion has been part of contemporary discourses on leadership in both general and educational contexts for many years (McNay, 1995; Ramsden, 1998b; Rost, 1991). Within HE contexts, this discursive resource constructs management as ‘bad’ and ‘harmful’ because it undermines the notion of collegiality, a ‘traditional’ value of academic life (Bolden et al., 2008a; Henkel, 1997, 2005; McNay, 1995; Ylijoki, 2005, but also see criticisms about this notion in Chapter 2). The image of PA’s boss as an authoritarian leader was intensified with the remark, “he was trying to run the place as though it was like a business”. His boss emerged, through this image, as a person who inappropriately ran his workplace against the nature of, presumably, ‘collegial academy’.

In addition to the notion of ‘management is bad leadership’, PA seemed to also draw on a two-factor conception of leadership behaviour (Yukl, 1999b) as a discursive resource to construct his boss’s ‘ineffective’ leadership. The way in which he described his boss’s behavioural preference (“getting the task done and getting people to obey the rules and stuff is worth a sacrifice in terms of how people get on with each other”) invoked two oppositional behaviours: task-oriented versus people-oriented behaviours. This discursive resource constructs individuals as practising stereotypical behaviours, which has the effect of concealing the complexity of leadership processes and the uncertainty of their outcomes (Yukl, 1999b). By associating his boss with task-oriented behaviours and framing people-oriented behaviours as more effective (“you get much better outcomes in the long term”), PA was able to position his boss as an ineffective leader who did not care about or value his colleagues.

Alongside these two discursive resources, PA also used platitudes to repeatedly construct his boss as authoritarian and careless (“nobody feels valued” and “people don’t feel that he cares”) as his “natural inclination”. The use of

62 Broadly, task-oriented behaviours are often associated with improving efficiency, productivity and performance of organisation members while people-oriented behaviours are more associated with improving job satisfaction, building mutual trust, and increasing collective identification among organisation members (Yukl, 2008).
platitudes, as a linguistic device, often serves to construct, reproduce and obscure taken-for-granted assumptions (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 1998). In this extract, it worked to position PA’s boss as a naturally ‘ineffective’ leader, that is, it implied that the way his boss practised leadership was part of his ‘nature’, which cannot and will not change. By drawing on this platitude, PA also placed himself in opposition to his boss (“my natural inclination is to say, you’ve done a good job”), which in effect constituted him as an effective leader by virtue of his nature.

The following extract reveals how PA constructed himself more explicitly as an appropriate leader. Although this narrative did not follow extract 1 directly, it can still be read in relation to the previous narrative.

*Extract 2*

PA: I think my style of leadership in everything is pretty low key and unobtrusive and more sitting alongside people and helping them than standing over them and telling them what to do. I much more value people getting on with each other, and me getting on with people in a positive atmosphere. I think in an academic environment that’s the most appropriate because really, people do have academic freedom and that’s a valuable thing and if they want to go off and do research on something completely off the ball, then actually, that’s their right, and so I wouldn’t ever say to someone, no, you can’t do that, or I would if I think it’s a bad idea, I’d say, I didn’t think it was a good idea, but I wouldn’t say, you can’t.

From this extract, PA continued to position himself as “the most appropriate” leader. In so doing, he associated himself with socially ‘positive’ behaviours (“sitting alongside people and helping them”) in opposition to socially ‘negative’ behaviours (“standing over them and telling them what to do”), which in effect constituted the stereotypical image of ‘good’ leader for him to take up as part of his identity. Along this line, he also drew on discourses of ‘academic freedom’ and ‘individual autonomy’ as normative values and practices of his workplace (Altbach, 2001; Henkel, 2005). These discursive resources enabled him to claim his leadership style (“pretty low key and unobtrusive”) as “the most appropriate” because it can recognise and sustain such values and practices in academia.
Although PA did not mention his boss explicitly in this extract, his remark, “I much more value people getting on with each other”, can also be read in relation to what he said earlier about his boss. The repetition of words and sentences between extracts reveals ‘the rehearsed nature of talk’ in which narrators often draw on what they have said previously (either within or beyond their current conversation), as immediate resources for their talk (Taylor, 2006, 2012). Taylor (2005, p. 4) argues that the rehearsed nature of talk is “part of the extended process through which identities are constructed and taken up”. These immediate resources can both enable and constrain the narrators in their talk, which I will elaborate on further in the following sections.

**Participant B**

The second two extracts come from an interview with an early-career academic I refer to as Participant B (PB). Unlike PA, this academic talked about her boss in a positive way. In extract 3, she was talking about her experience of working as a tutor during her postgraduate study. During that time, there was a classroom discipline issue, but she felt she had no one to seek advice from because her immediate boss, the lecturer who was responsible for that class, had gone to a conference overseas. As a result, she had to make a “unilateral decision”, which made her feel “very, very nervous” because she was unsure how the lecturer would respond to her decision.

**Extract 3**

PB  So when he came back from the conference. I knocked on his door and I said, listen, I'm sorry. I've made this decision without your permission. Here's my rationale for it. I just remember being incredibly nervous and I said what the decision was and he said, well, why did you do that? So I shakily laid out my rationale. He goes, well, you can justify your decision. I'll support it. It was like yessssss (laughs). So we had an excellent working relationship from that point because I kind of understood, at that point, his leadership style, which was this idea of justifiable logic, you know, I will support you in your decisions as long as they're not stupid decisions. So, yeah, he was one of the good examples of leadership. Very
hands off, if you could justify it, he would support it. And, I’ve actually used that same phrase for my postgrads when they start teaching. If you can justify it, I will support it. Very hands off. Goal orientated.

In this extract, PB used her memory, as personal resource, to illustrate how her boss exercised his leadership by supporting her justifiable decision. In my reading, this particular resource seemed to constitute at least two effects within the same narrative. On the one hand, it constituted her boss as a person who was willing to support his team members as long as they were able to justify their decision. On the other hand, it constituted PB as a person who, despite being incredibly nervous, was able to justify her decision. She emerged as somewhat of a heroine, an anxious tutor who was able to grow through a difficult situation.

In addition, PB’s narrative suggested that this particular memory has shaped not only her understanding of what ‘good’ leadership was, but also her practice of leadership with her “postgrads”. Describing her boss’s style of leadership as “very hands off, if you could justify it, he would support it”, and then repeating this as her own style, she took up a similar position as her boss who she had just positioned as “one of the good examples of leadership”. However, it is also interesting to note her proviso “as long as they’re not stupid decisions”. This remark raises an important question about the power relations at play within the workplace, that is, who gets to decide which decision is ‘justifiable’ and which decision is ‘stupid’? The answer to such a question is often taken-for-granted within the hierarchical structure of workplaces where positional leaders often decide based on their own subjective judgements.

The following extract illustrates how PB constructed herself explicitly as a particular kind of appropriate leader. In this extract, she was talking about how she practised leadership when sitting on several committees within The University.
PB: I'm very goal oriented, a bulldozer. I like to get stuff done. I've become a little more willing to sometimes say, okay, I've heard all the options and now we're doing it my way. So, yeah, I can be a little bit more didactic sometimes but I try not to be because I hate commands from on high. I try to be the leader I would like to be, but not always successful (laughs). But, you know, as I've gotten more responsibility, I sometimes realise that people's requests, even though they're quite logical, they don't fit within the wider cost-benefit analysis. It would be awesome if we would have the time to explore all these options but we don't. So sometimes I've kind of had to learn how to say, we are going to take the most direct route. We're going to do this, this, this, and this to get to this goal. Anybody got a better idea? No. Okay. Let's go. We need to achieve X. Let's achieve X however we can.

In this extract, the rehearsed nature of talk was also evident when PB repeated her self-description as “goal-oriented” in both extracts. Her leadership style was associated with her personality (“I'm very goal oriented” and “I like to get stuff done”), which may suggest that she applied it in both academia and other contexts of life. The image of “a bulldozer” seems to evoke a stereotypical image of a masculine leader who is tough, powerful, and forward moving—qualities that are often associated with the tradition of the heroic leader (see more discussion in Chapter 6). This particular image also elicited the idea that destruction is a part of progress, which might indicate her understanding of leadership in general.

It is interesting to note the tensions in her account, the way in which she took up seemingly contradictory positions. Her conflict between what she desired to be as a leader and what she recognised herself doing/being in ‘reality’ seems to resonate with what Wetherell (1998) calls ‘trouble’ in identity work. Trouble occurs when the narrators take up either a subject position that contradicts their previous or ongoing positions (such as insisting on absolute authority while previously describing oneself as anti-authoritarian) or a subject position that is negatively valued in particular contexts (such as being authoritarian in the context of HE) (Reynolds, Wetherell, & Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). As Wetherell and Edley (1998) point out, individuals are usually accountable to
each other in their interactions (including to a researcher in an interview). Thus, departures from “what everybody knows to be appropriate” to take up a troubled position requires the narrators to repair or justify their newly occupied position in order to make their identities appropriate again (Wetherell & Edley, 1998, p. 161). PB’s narrative suggested that she took up a troubled position of a leader who was “a little bit more didactic” which, I assumed, contradicted her ongoing position as a person who “hate[s] commands from on high”. Conceding that she was “not always successful” meant that she did not (or could not) reject such a troubled position, hence requiring her to justify it to me as her audience.

PB’s remark, “But, you know, as I’ve gotten more responsibility...”, can be read as part of her rhetorical work (Billig, 1987) in response to any potential criticisms derived from taking up such a troubled position. It served to qualify her as a person who took more responsibility and had more experience, perhaps, than her colleagues. In her response, she seemed to draw on a managerial discourse which tends to constitute individual members as being accountable for their organisation’s performance (Alexander, 2000). Within the logic of this discourse, disregarding “people’s [quite logical] requests” because “they don’t fit within the wider cost-benefit analysis” seemed to require a strong and single-minded leader—just like her—to enact this approach. Together, this discursive resource enabled PB to not only repair her troubled position as a ‘didactic’ leader, but also take up a position of an effective leader who led her team to achieve their goal, in whatever way necessary.

**Participant C**

The third pair of extracts came from a mid-career academic I refer to as Participant C (PC). Similar to PB, this academic talked about his boss very positively. In the extract below, he was speaking about his workplace environment which he considered “very supportive” for his development as an academic and also as a leader. To give an example, he focused on his boss whom he considered to be “a very good leader”.

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Extract 5

PC: We have a very good leader here. He's one of the very few deans, I think, in this whole university who has kept up all of his teaching responsibilities. He's involved in so many different things and he's always so incredibly positive and that's really encouraging and really inspiring. Just seeing how he works, I get a lot from that.

A: What does he actually do that is really inspiring for you?

PC: Well everything he does (laughs). It's just the way he conducts himself. He's a real people person and he's always incredibly positive and he knows people's names and he can have really good discussion with people. He's also an amazing teacher. He's won all the teaching awards and so on. And he has the most incredible research that he's leading, you know, worth billions of dollars. He'd be the most research active person in New Zealand in terms of the amount of money that he's researching with.

In this extract, PC positioned his boss as “a very good leader” who was responsible, positive, and successful. Such a position was constituted with reference to some established ideas of an ‘ideal academic leader’ (such as “a real people person”, “an amazing teacher”, and “the most research active person”) (Bolden et al., 2012; Hoppe, 2003). Throughout this particular extract, the image of his boss was ideally constructed, almost as ‘super-human’, an image often invoked within the dominant discourse of the ‘great man’ leader (Borgatta, Bales, & Couch, 1954). Within this discourse, a ‘real’ leader must have superior qualities and achievements that set him apart from everyone else (Organ, 1996).

In addition to the discourse of the ‘great man’ leader, PC seemed to also draw on the discourse of charismatic leadership, a modern revival of the ‘great man’ (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002), to describe his boss’s “really encouraging and really inspiring” leadership. His description of “the way [his boss] conducts himself” resonated with the qualities associated with charismatic leaders.

63 I use the male pronoun here to indicate the gender bias embedded within this discourse.
including having a positive outlook, a sense of commitment, and communication skills (Howell & Avolio, 1992: Howell & Shamir, 2005, see more discussion in Chapter 2). The combination of these qualities is believed by leadership scholars to be powerful in motivating followers to achieve ‘maximum’ outcomes for their organisations (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b). Both discourses of the great man leader and charismatic leadership have been rightly criticised by leadership scholars for over-emphasising individual’s qualities and achievements while neglecting the complexity of leadership processes and the role of ‘followers’ (Bensimon et al., 1989; Collinson, 2005; Middlehurst, 1993: Yukl, 1999a). Moreover, a number of scholars have also charged these discourses with overlooking the ‘darker side’ of charismatic leaders, especially their manipulative strategies (Aaltio-Marjosola & Takala, 2000; Bass, 1990a; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Bligh, Kohles, & Pillai, 2011; Bryman, 1993; Calás, 1993: House & Howell, 1992: Howell & Avolio, 1992).

Despite robust criticisms, these discourses have continued to exert their dominance in how individuals make sense of leadership especially in both mainstream scholarly literature and popular media. More than half of the academics in my study invoked these discourses when they talked, or expressed a ‘respectful love’ (Parry & Kempster, Forthcoming), about their bosses, supervisors, or senior colleagues as idealised models of leadership, which in effect constituted these participants as admirers or aspirants. Like them, PC’s narrative constituted him as an admirer who was ‘encouraged’ and ‘inspired’ by “just seeing how [his boss] works”. This recognition and praising of the positive qualities of his boss also served to constitute himself as a person who shared similar aspirations.

Extract 6 displays how PC constructed himself as a particular kind of leader in academia. The extract again highlights the rehearsed nature of talk although he did this in a different way to PA and PB. Prior to the extract below, he was telling me that he always considered himself as a leader at work, hence my following question.
Extract 6

A: So how do you see yourself in terms of being a leader?

PC: I'm not that charismatic type of person to be able to really connect with people and so on. I mean, I'm not one of those who just sort of go into a room and they can just express themselves so beautifully and people just really get a buzz off them and get that energy from them and so on. I don't really like that attention (laughs). It's just not me. I suppose I'm more of an introvert than an extrovert. I'm sort of a quiet, determined, get on and do things type of leader. I'm much more comfortable just working quietly behind the scenes and getting things done and I'm quite happy about bringing people together, and more sort of just hands on, doing things, I suppose. For me, leaders come in all different ways and it's not necessarily that you're aiming to be Vice-Chancellor or the dean or whatever. You still need leaders at different levels.

In this extract, the rehearsed nature of talk can be identified in how PC answered my first question, “So how do you see yourself in terms of being a leader?” Instead of answering it directly, his reply, “I'm not that charismatic type of person...” might be read in relation to how he talked about his boss whom he previously positioned as a charismatic leader in extract 5. The word “that” suggests his awareness of social expectations that a leader should be charismatic, like his boss, who can “really connect with people and so on”. His remark, “I'm not one of those...” followed by an idealised image of a charismatic leader, functioned to position him as a ‘non-charismatic’ leader or, to be precise, as a less ‘appropriate’ leader within a two-factor conception of thinking (Yukl, 1999b). Such a position may be read as trouble for his identity construction because a non-charismatic leader has often been negatively valued in organisations and societies (Atwater, Penn, & Rucker, 1991; Conger, 1999).

Similar to PB in extract 4, PC's utterances may be read as an attempt to repair his troubled position as a ‘non-charismatic’ leader. Foregrounding his personality and preference for particular leadership practices with positive feelings (“I'm much more comfortable...” and “I'm quite happy...”) enabled him to invoke a notion of ‘authentic self’ as a counter response to social expectations of a
charismatic leader. This notion of an ‘authentic self’ works to essentialise individuals’ ‘true selves’ as the core of their being compared to how they should practise leadership in their everyday lives (Ford & Harding, 2011). His remark, “It’s just not me”, intensified his rationale for refusing to be someone else (a charismatic leader) that was not ‘true’ to himself, which enabled him to justify his troubled position as a non-charismatic leader.

In addition to this, his statement, “For me, leaders come in all different ways...”, can be read as his rhetorical work against potential (and imagined) criticisms that might question the appropriateness of being a non-charismatic leader in academia. To justify his position, PC seemed to invoke a discourse of distributed/collective leadership associated with post-heroic models of leadership (Gosling et al., 2009). This discourse emphasises a horizontal approach to leadership in which organisation members at all levels are recognised for their leadership contributions through their everyday interactions with each other (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004, but also see criticisms of this particular discourse in Chapter 2). By drawing on this particular discourse, PC seemed able to justify his troubled position by re-labelling himself as a different but appropriate leader, a “quiet, determined, get on and do things type”, who could also make important contributions (at different levels) to his institution.

**Participant D**

The last two extracts came from a mid-career academic I refer to as Participant D (PD). In the following extract, she was talking about a problem in her department, which she attributed to issues of leadership.

**Extract 7**

PD: The leader we have here wants to be everybody’s friend and spend hours and hours talking and nothing actually really gets done and so has lost a lot of respect for, with a lot of the staff. It’s just a waste of time. I’m just so over it. I’m so sick of it. The style that he has, he’s sort of a magnet for a lot of followers, especially female followers who adore him.
A: And you’re not one of them.

PD: I might have been when I first arrived here but I’m way past that. I’ve become an independent researcher, putting my foot down that my time’s not going to be wasted and I’m not going to spend hours sitting in his office, yakking.

In this extract, PD constructed her boss as an inappropriate leader by negatively describing some of his behaviours. It is interesting to note how she described him (“want[ing] to be everybody’s friend” and “[being] a magnet for a lot of followers”), which might be interpreted in other contexts, by other people, as qualities of a people-oriented, collegial or charismatic leader. Reading her narrative, I interpreted that she did not subscribe to these styles of leadership and, instead, associated her boss’s behaviours with negative values and outcomes. Along this line, she emphasised that her boss “has lost a lot of respect for, with a lot of the staff”, which signalled that she was not the only one who felt that way, hence representing her claim more as a collective agreement rather than an individual opinion. Her expression, “I’m just so over it. I’m so sick of it”, worked to magnify her negative feelings towards him as a result.

In addition, PD’s remark about her boss being “a magnet for a lot of followers”, with particular emphasis on “especially female followers who adore him”, raised the issue of what counts as appropriate behaviour in the workplace. Although she did not say explicitly what was inappropriate about her boss’s personality, her remark invoked an image of a less serious—‘fun-to-be-around’—leader who tended to “spend hours and hours talking and nothing actually really gets done”. Such a stereotypical image seems to constitute her boss as a less respectful leader whose personality nevertheless seemed to attract others, especially “female followers”. My utterance, “And you’re not one of them”, seemed to both position her and invite her to position herself as different from those “female followers” she talked about. Admitting that she might have been one of those women in the past but not anymore enabled her to take up a position of a person who was once naïve and, perhaps, easily drawn into her boss’s style of leadership but then had developed the ability to resist his ‘magnetic’ personality.
Interestingly, the way in which PD constructed those “female followers who adore [her boss]” in contrast to herself, she seemed to draw on some of the characteristics of stereotypical femininity and masculinity respectively. Her talk about the “female followers” implies her negative views of characteristics associated with stereotypical femininity – that some women are vulnerable to her boss’s magnetic personality (Allan, 2003). On the contrary, when talking about herself, PD seemed to draw on some of the stereotypical characteristics of masculinity including being independent, strong, assertive, and self-reliant (Smith & Kimmel, 2005). The combination of these characteristics together constituted for PD a powerful position of a masculine hero(ine) who refused to be dependent on her ‘inappropriate’ leader.

The final extract below focuses on PD’s approach to leadership at work. Prior to this extract, she was talking about practising leadership with some students whom she supervised. Although she did not talk explicitly about being a particular kind of leader in this extract, her narrative can still be read as constituting part of her identity as an ‘appropriate’ leader.

*Extract 8*

**PD:** I’ve got one student at the moment who’s tried to become my friend and I’ve found that very difficult. The older I get, the more I’m determined that won’t happen.

**A:** Why is that?

**PD:** Because I have to keep that sort of respect, I think. I have to keep a slightly level above them. I can see within the department, some of the staff perhaps get the feeling that I’m a little bit cold and don’t give enough of myself personally. It’s hard to explain but I just keep that little bit of distance and keep that respect so that it’s clear. I’m afraid that if I let those boundaries go, then they’ll walk all over you. If I become too much of their friend, then if they want to do something a certain way or have the research plan go a certain way, then you know, I’ll be too weak to come back and take over that leadership, get back that leadership role again. It’s got to be quite separate. You’ve got to have leadership to keep a
structure within a place. I’ve got to have that respect from the students to keep that structure going.

Although PD’s comment about one of her students in this extract was very brief, the way she constructed it seemed to position this student as somewhat a threat to her identity as a leader. My question, despite being very short, can be read as both inviting her to further explain the reason (why is that?) but also challenging her attitude towards her student (why does it have to be that way?). Her very long answer thus can be read as her explanation to my general query and/or her justification to my challenge.

In her answer, PD drew on the notion of ‘keeping respect’ with her students, which became the main theme of her narrative as she repeated it a few times throughout this extract. This notion was also invoked in her previous extract when she mentioned her boss as someone she “has lost a lot of respect for”. Reading between these two extracts points to the rehearsed nature of talk and suggests that the notion of ‘keeping respect’ might be important for PD’s identity work. From this extract alone, her repeated concern with keeping (or, perhaps, losing) respect with her students also included “keeping a slightly level above them”, “keep[ing] that little bit of distance”, and “keep[ing] a structure within a place”). These images of distance and hierarchy resonate with characteristics of ‘bureaucratic’ leadership in which formal hierarchy, authority regulation, and hierarchical control are often highlighted especially in HE contexts (Bolden et al., 2008a; McNay, 1995). In other words, to be an appropriate, or respectful, leader, for PD, is to keep a level above, a distance from, and a structure in place for her students.

In addition to the notion of keeping respect, PD seemed to be aware that her ‘bureaucratic’ appearance was perceived by some of the staff as “a little bit cold… [and not giving] enough of [herself] personally”. This remark created trouble in her identity work because it suggested that her leadership approach did not fit with a conventional understanding of what an appropriate leader is supposed to be such as warm and friendly. To repair her troubled identity, PD drew on some worst-case scenarios, as part of her personal resources, to construct what might happen if she did not keep respect with her students. These imagined scenarios
constituted her in the position of a vulnerable leader, whose leadership was always in jeopardy, hence needing to be protected. Within these scenarios, her students were also constituted as potentially dangerous people who might “walk all over [her]” if she did not maintain boundaries and distance. As a result, these discursive resources enabled PD to not only repair her troubled position as a ‘bureaucratic’ leader but also re-claim her identity as an appropriate leader, at least for herself.

**Becoming an effective leader in academia: Whose effectiveness is it anyway?**

So, what have we learned from these four snapshots? What might they tell us about the notion of effective leadership, this ‘Holy Grail’, in academia? Certainly, there were a variety of preferences and practices of leadership among these four academics. It should be clear that each of them had their own understanding of what effective leadership is. As I stated earlier, however, my interest in this chapter is neither what traits, qualities or behaviours are considered in/effective leadership in academia, nor whether academics’ perceptions of themselves or others was accurate or real. Instead, I am much more interested in the discursive resources that makes it possible for these academics to talk about themselves and others as more or less effective leaders.

From my analysis, it is apparent that effective leadership is contextual: context is crucial to how the academics made sense of their and others’ leadership whether it is appropriate or not. Yet, context is not given but socially constructed and interpreted by individuals, often in different ways, depending upon the discursive resources they have access to (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2012). For example, PA considered academia as a traditional place of intellectual values where collegiality, autonomy and academic freedom are highlighted. In contrast, despite feeling dubious about her own approach to leadership, PB understood academia in much more managerial terms, where cost-benefit analyses and time management are more important than collegial decision-making. PC talked about academia as a place where different types of leadership are all important at different levels within the institution while, for PD, academia seemed to be a
threatening place where it is important to defend oneself against the encroachments others might make upon the balance of power in professional relationships. What these academics constructed as their contexts, I argue, seemed to depend upon the discursive resources they had access to. These discursive resources did not only shape how they made sense of their own and others’ leadership but also enabled them to justify why certain kinds of leadership were more or less effective than others.

In addition, I observed that when these academics talked about others, especially their bosses (but also their colleagues and students), they deliberately positioned these people in particular ways which can be understood as ‘gossiping’ (Harré & Langenhove, 1991). Sabini and Silver (1982, p. 102) explain individuals’ ‘gossip’ or talk about others is often based on their taken-for-granted beliefs that “moral decisions are external, shared, and independent of their personal wants, beliefs, and desires”. In other words, what academics assumed to be the reality of others was actually their version of reality based on their own personal wants, beliefs, and desires. As a result, what they constructed about others may not tell us much about these others but more about the speakers and their subject positions in relation to those who they talk about.

As I have shown, when PA and PD positioned their bosses as ineffective leaders because their leadership styles were inappropriate for academic contexts, these positionings also had discursive effects in constituting them as persons of higher moral status who knew better what was more appropriate for their workplace. In a similar vein, when PB and PC positioned their bosses as examples of good leadership, it also constituted them (both PB and PC) as like-minded persons who shared similar outlooks on life, just like their bosses. Despite similar patterns in how they constructed themselves and others as in/effective leaders, it was apparent that these four academics held different perspectives of what effective leadership was.

I have argued that even though these academics seemed to draw on similar discursive resources that were largely associated with dominant discourses of leadership (such as people-oriented, task-oriented, collegial, charismatic, and bureaucratic leadership), the ways in which they drew on these discourses were
not necessarily the same. For example, PA and PD both seemed to draw on the discourse of people-oriented leadership in their narratives. While PA considered a people-oriented style as appropriate for his workplace environment, PD condemned this very same style as inappropriate for her context. Taylor (2012) argues that despite dominant resources shaping individuals’ ways of thinking, these resources are also shaped by other resources tied to individuals' personal contexts. In Bakhtin’s (1981) terms, dominant resources (centripetal forces) and personal resources (centrifugal forces) do not only coexist in any given moment, but also relate with one another in a dialogical way. As a result, these dialogic relations constitute unique subject positions for individuals to take up and/or resist as part of their identities.

My analysis of these academics’ accounts also highlighted the rehearsed nature of talk and how previous tellings in earlier extracts, and also throughout their accounts, become personal resources for their ongoing narrative construction. These resources, argues Taylor (2012, p. 7), include narrators’ life stories, crucial memories, images and mottos they repeatedly drew on in their talk. From their narratives, PA drew on the importance of “people getting on with each other” to talk about effective leadership while PB emphasised attaining goals as part of her personality as a leader. For PC, being “charismatic” seemed to be an important quality of good leadership even though he may not understand himself in this way, while for PD, maintaining “respect” with followers was considered more appropriate for her leadership. The personal resources evident in their narratives signalled repeated patterns, which individuals consistently drew on when making sense of themselves within and beyond the context of their telling. Indeed, these resources can be understood as part of individuals’ invested identities through repeating and rehearsing particular subject positions (Taylor, 2005).

By focusing on the continuity of these academics’ narratives, I do not suggest that their identities are coherent or enduring. Rather, what I have presented in this chapter so far highlights how these academics’ identities are always in the process of becoming, a process which is never fully completed and never fully coherent (Kondo, 1990). Some narrators, as I have illustrated, took up contradictory positions (such as PB and PC), which created trouble in their
identities and required repair, at least, at the moment of their tellings. As my analysis has shown, these individual academics had to continuously construct and negotiate their identities with their interlocutors (real and imagined) in order to claim not any leadership identity, but an appropriate one. This notion is important because it problematises most of the dominant discourses of effective leadership that tend to construct leaders' identities as fixed and ahistorical, and that it is simply a recipe to follow.

When reading through my participants' narratives, including others beyond the four academics in this chapter, I recognised that most of them took for granted what they considered to be effective or appropriate leadership without considering alternatives (except, for example, the case of PC). This recognition prompts me to reflect on my own assumptions about effective leadership, what I have often taken for granted and what I have often perceived as unintelligible in others' leadership approaches. Indeed, I would suggest that it is necessary for individual academics to begin reflecting on how we experience and understand effective leadership, how we appropriate particular identities, and the ways in which we work to make such identities socially appropriate. Doing so will open up dialogue and new possibilities of thinking and practising beyond the illusions of effective leadership.
CHAPTER 8

BECOMING A LEADER IN ACADEMIA

Closing reflections

Almost no area of inquiry or interest has shown itself to be more elusive, or more controversial, and also more confounding to human understanding, than the notion of leadership. (Allix & Gronn, 2005, p. 181)

This final chapter offers reflections on my thesis and also my journey as a researcher. I take up a different voice than previous chapters, a voice that enables me to reflect and comment on the contributions of my study. I begin by teasing out key arguments advanced in the last three chapters. Next, I identify and discuss the contributions this study offers, and its implications for HE, leadership studies, and related fields. Following this, I consider a number of limitations that constrain the findings, and offer recommendations for future research in this field. I conclude this chapter with my personal reflections, revisiting my research journey and transformation as a researcher and as a person.

The narratives of leadership in academia

My analyses from the last three chapters have provided answers to the research questions I proposed in Chapter 1. The findings in these chapters have illustrated the different ways in which the academics in my study experienced and made sense of their leadership in academia. I have demonstrated how these academics constructed their narratives of leadership by drawing on discursive resources, both socially established and personally developed, that were available to them in their institutional, socio-cultural and political contexts. I have also shown how these discursive resources constituted material and discursive effects for individual academics, rendering certain ways of thinking, practising, and
becoming intelligible and possible for them. In my analyses, I have focused on three particular narratives of leadership, viewed as discursive resources, that were dominant in my participants' accounts, namely, legitimate leadership, heroic leadership, and effective leadership in academic contexts. I argue that these three narratives have often been taken-for-granted by leadership researchers, HEIs, and academics themselves as something given and unproblematic. In what follows, I summarise the key findings of my analyses and discuss the overall findings.

In Chapter 5, I identified four particular constructs of leadership as discursive resources that my participants drew on to make sense of, and to claim, their legitimacy as leaders in academia. These constructs were: leadership as position; leadership as performance; leadership as practice; and leadership as professional role model. The first two constructs were more commonly espoused within the institutional documents. They underline the hierarchical nature of institutions and evaluation systems in which leadership is understood as headship positions and reflective of individual achievements at work. The last two constructs were more commonly espoused within my participants’ interview accounts. They emphasise personal recognition and an open-ended interpretation of how individuals practise and be(come) leaders in their professional contexts.

In Chapter 6, I focused on the patterns of narratives that my participants commonly drew on to make sense of their experiences of leadership in academia. I identified four themes which resonate with the main storyline of the heroic narrative, depicting a heroic leader who is ‘overcoming challenges’, ‘upholding moral and professional integrity’, ‘helping and mentoring others’, and ‘serving the community’. From these four themes, I suggested that there are at least two overarching subject positions, namely, the hegemonic hero and the altruistic hero that the academics in my study took up as part of their identities as leaders. The hegemonic hero position is fuelled by the dialogic relations between discourses of individualism, autonomy, and masculinity. In contrast, the altruistic hero position is underpinned by the dialogic relations between the aforementioned discourses and alternative discourses of pastoral care, relational building, collectivism, and ‘making a difference’. Both positions, I argued, coexist within the academic context, enabling individual academics to make sense of themselves
as certain kinds of (heroic) leaders in their everyday lives.

In Chapter 7, I problematised the search for (and perhaps the obsession about) effective leadership in contemporary organisations, including the academy. I demonstrated that what we often come to think about as effective or ineffective leadership is always contextual and value-laden. By focusing on how individual academics constructed themselves and others as certain kinds of in/effective leaders in their talk, my analysis highlighted the binary thinking associated with competing dominant discourses of leadership, including collegial vs. bureaucratic leadership, task-oriented vs. people-oriented leadership, and charismatic vs. distributed leadership, among others. I argued that what the academics understood as in/effective leadership depended primarily on their assumptions about HE environments, as well as their personal preferences for leadership styles developed throughout their lives. These interdependent factors, as my analysis suggested, were largely constituted through discursive resources available to these academics in their personal and broader social contexts, rendering certain ways of practising leadership intelligible for each of them.

Overall, my analyses from Chapters 5 – 7 revealed different ways in which my participants drew on multiple discursive resources of leadership, both socially established and personally developed, when constructing their accounts of leadership in the research interviews. I focused particularly on how their narrative constructions, viewed as discursive practices, constituted a range of subject positions for them to take up or resist as part of their emerging identities. These constructions also included when the academics were talking about others (their bosses, colleagues, and students), which positioned them and the others in particular ways within the same discursive field of power relations (Davies, 1989; Davies & Harré, 1990). As a result, there were multiple leadership identities constituted within these discursive practices that each individual academic took up in their talk. These identities, as I demonstrated in the last three chapters, can range from aspiring to established leaders, from successful to vulnerable leaders, from autonomous to community leaders, from caring to courageous leaders, from people-oriented to task-oriented leaders, from bureaucratic to collegial leaders, and many more. These are examples of multiple leadership identities that were taken up across the accounts of academics and also within
each individual’s account.

In the following section, I identify and discuss the contributions my study makes to the research on, and knowledge about, leadership in academia. In particular, I highlight some insights emerging from my findings around the micro-politics of HE and identity construction.

**Contributions to studies of leadership in higher education**

My study makes a number of contributions to the field of leadership studies in HE. It provides a comprehensive account of experiences and understandings of leadership from individual academics who may or may not hold formal positions within their institution. As I argued at the beginning of this thesis and elsewhere, the majority of leadership studies in HE are underpinned by a general assumption that leadership only belongs to individuals who hold formal positions within the institution (Juntrasook et al., 2013; and also see Middlehurst, 2008). The focus on leadership beyond formal positions has rarely been researched within or beyond the HE field (see earlier discussion in Chapter 1). As a result, many individuals and collectives who do not hold formal positions are often overlooked and, to a certain extent, marginalised by the majority of leadership researchers. My study responds to this gap by challenging the dominant discourse of HE leadership that legitimises who counts as a leader and what counts as leadership. It also asks what happens when academics consider themselves to be leaders, whatever that means to them, irrespective of whether their institution or colleagues perceive them to be.

Since I began my study in 2009, I have located only one study in the UK with an inclusive focus on academics with and without positions about their conceptions of ‘academic leadership’ and the impacts of such conceptions on their leadership-related attitudes and behaviours (see Bolden, Gosling, & O’Brien, forthcoming; Bolden et al., 2012). My study is similarly inclusive, but also different in its focus on the discursive resources of leadership that render certain ways of thinking about leadership in academia possible and intelligible. In short, rather than taking the ways in which academics make sense of their experiences and
understandings at face value, I have examined what makes it possible for them to think and talk about leadership in the ways they do. I will return to this in more detail later.

Another unique feature of my study, in the context of leadership studies in HE, is its paradigm. Broadly, the field of leadership studies in HE has continued to operate within an instrumental paradigm, seeking to identify universally effective models and practices of leadership within HEIs. In this study, I have worked within a more critical paradigm, attempting to examine and unsettle the common ways in which we, academics, come to think about leadership in everyday work. In so doing, I offer a fresh take on leadership in HE, as socially constructed, discursive, and dialogic. This focus challenges the normative construction of leadership in organisations and societies, which often takes leadership for granted as necessary, apolitical, and unproblematic (Alvesson, 1996, 2011; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2012).

My conceptual framework—a discursive-dialogic approach—provides powerful analytical tools to examine individuals' narratives in relation to the discursive and dialogic processes of their identity construction embedded within a field of power relations. This approach helped me explore dominant, socially established resources (or centripetal forces) as well as alternative, personally developed resources (or centrifugal forces) that individual academics drew on to make sense of their leadership. The discursive aspect of this approach enabled me to examine the constitutive effects of these discursive resources—especially narratives of legitimate, heroic, and effective leadership—that have shaped individual academics in their thinking, practising, and becoming. The dialogic aspect directed me to the tensions/relations between these multiple, often contradictory, resources, focusing on how their dialogical relations co-constituted unique, dialogic subject positions for individuals to take up as part of their identities. The focus on these identity constructions reveals different ways in which individual academics construct and negotiate their identities as leaders within the constraints of their institutions and broader society. I argue that a discursive-dialogic approach is important for leadership studies in HE and relevant fields because it allows a complex, multi-layered exploration of leadership phenomenon that may not be possible when using single analytical lenses.
Leadership and the micro-politics of higher education

Following Foucault’s (1980) advice on the necessity of studying the actual operations of power at the level of micro-politics, my study illustrates what the micro-politics of leadership in HE may look like at both institutional and individual levels. Through my reading of institutional documents I have argued that the institution—where this study took place—officially recognises, supports, and rewards certain forms of leadership such as position and performance. It is thus arguable that these institutional practices structurally exclude other forms of leadership (including mentoring and representing communities) from their reward systems. As a result, a large number of academics who may practise differing forms of leadership are unlikely to be recognised, supported, and rewarded by their own institution.

Institutional discursive practices, however, do not preclude individual academics from practising leadership in other ways. In my participants’ accounts, only a few of them talked about leadership as position, and even fewer appeared to endorse this particular construct. Many referred to leadership as performance but often with a sense of disinterest, weariness or even frustration. These findings highlight the disparities of meaning and value accorded to leadership by institutions and individuals. On the contrary, most of participants evinced more enthusiasm and passion when talking about their everyday roles as informal leaders, especially in their work with colleagues, students, and communities. From this observation, one possible conclusion might be: no matter which discursive constructions are privileged at a HEI, individual academics will still be able to exercise their leadership despite these institutional constraints. While this somewhat optimistic conclusion recognises the possibility of agency, it does not take into account some of the material and emotional ‘realities’, such as institutional promotion policies or anxiety arising from conflicting expectations. In other words, many academics still encounter challenges and prejudices in their working environments regardless of what forms of leadership they choose to practise.

I have argued in the last three chapters that the tensions between centripetal (institutional and authoritative) and centrifugal (alternative and personal) forces
necessarily affect academics’ identities and practices. One of the tensions identified centres on the conflict between what academics consider to be their approach to leadership (including mentoring colleagues and students, serving their communities, and creating a collaborative environment) and what their institution requires them to do in order to be considered a leader (including taking headship/administrative roles and sustaining a high level of performance as a researcher, teacher and service provider). A number of academics reported feeling weary and frustrated about not having time and energy to focus on their own research performance because they were invited to sit on a number of committees or committed to their mentoring role for other students and colleagues. As P20 (from Chapter 6) remarked in her narrative, practising (informal) leadership can become “your own punishment”. While many participants perceived these additional responsibilities as part of their leadership, these forms of leadership tend to be recognised as personal, voluntary, and peripheral within the institution.

The findings of my study suggest that certain social groups, such as women and indigenous academics (and those who occupy both positions) feel these tensions acutely. As I discussed in Chapter 6, these academics are often expected to serve their identified communities (in their own time) because they perceive it to be part of their leadership. Many of them talked about their workloads in terms of having to juggle their academic work and informal leadership services within and outside the institution. Informal leadership practices may take up space and energy that could have been spent on research and publication; yet, ultimately, these academics are still subjected to evaluation of their research performance according to the same criteria as colleagues who are men, and/or Pākehā. This is one of many examples of gender and ethnic/racial inequity within HEIs, a finding already established by feminist and indigenous scholars (see Blackmore & Sachs, 2000; Essed, 2000; Eveline, 2004).

The persistence of gender and ethnic/racial inequity is largely underpinned by discourses of masculinity coupled with neoliberalism within the discursive field of HE. While discourses of masculinity emphasise independence, instrumentality, and competitiveness of individual academics (Thomas & Davies, 2002), discourses of neoliberalism underline their self-responsibility and (illusive)
autonomy within their workplace (Davies & Bansel, 2005). Together these discourses co-constitute an institutional environment where high levels of ‘productivity’ and ‘achievement’ are expected from all individual academics in exchange for job security, recognition, and rewards from their institution. These discourses, in effect, do not recognise commitments to community, personal growth, and collective care as priorities for the institution (Blackmore & Sachs, 2003, 2007). Accordingly, many women and indigenous academics may continue to face inequity because their leadership practices with communities are considered low priority within the neoliberal-masculinist systems of HE. At worst, this inequity may result in these academics experiencing isolation and burnout, and ultimately, withdrawing from their institution (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Bunda & White, 2009; Doyle & Hind, 1998). The ramifications of this will be discussed later in the implications section of this chapter.

It is important to note here that I am aware the categories ‘women’ and ‘indigenous’ are fluid and dynamic. I want to avoid suggesting that all women and indigenous academics perceive community service as part of their leadership. Although all participants, who identified themselves as Māori or Pasifika, talked about their commitment to serving their communities, they also mentioned that such a commitment does not necessarily apply to all of their colleagues from similar cultural backgrounds. Likewise, not all of the women in my study talked about serving or mentoring their women colleagues and students. Some focused their talk more on leadership as performance and other forms of practice beyond those associated with their gender (such as disciplinary leadership and leadership of teaching and research). These findings reflect recent work of leadership scholars who argue against essentialist constructions of ‘female leadership’ as nurturing, collaborative, and relational, and ‘male leadership’ as instrumental, competitive, and bureaucratic (Acker, 2010; Briskin, 2006; Collard, 2001; Wilkinson & Blackmore, 2008). As Acker (2012) argues, despite social categories that may shape how individuals make sense of and practise their leadership, these coexist with “micropolitical positioning and individual life events that made the situation unpredictable and uneasy” (p. 424). In other words, there are many possible factors, known and unknown, that shape not only how individual academics understand and practise their leadership but also how they are perceived by others in their everyday lives.
My analyses demonstrate the complexity and fluidity of how academics practise leadership in relation to their gender. Both men and women in my study drew on characteristics of ‘male leadership’ and ‘female leadership’ interchangeably when talking about their leadership in different contexts. However, some feminist scholars have warned that it is naïve to overlook social and cultural expectations of men and women in terms of their legitimacy as leaders in public domains (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Calás & Smircich, 1991; Martin, 1990; Sinclair, 1998). Such expectations tend to marginalise women academics in their leadership roles because they do not fit stereotypical images of leaders derived from discourses of masculinity. Because of these discursive practices in organisations and societies, women (and men) who do not perform characteristics of masculinity are often positioned as other in their institutions (as discussed in Chapter 6). This understanding echoes the issue of underrepresentation of women in HE, especially in formal leadership positions, referred to by several women participants (see more discussion on gender issues in relation to leadership in Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Calás & Smircich, 1991; Fletcher, 2003, 2004; Ford, 2005; Martin, 1990, 1994; Sinclair, 1998, 2007).

Attending to the micro-politics of leadership in HE enables us to recognise the complexity of power at work within an organisation. Despite the possibilities for academics to negotiate their leadership identities and practices at work, their everyday lives are still very much shaped by the boundaries of dominant discourses embedded within their institution and wider society. Weedon (1997, p. 109) reminds us, however, that “dominant discourses governing the organisation and practices of social institutions are under constant challenge”. This remark should prompt us, as researchers, to explore and make visible resistance to these discourses from individual academics in their everyday practices, including leadership (see Barry, Chandler, & Clark, 2001; Teelken, 2012).

**Leadership and identity construction**

My study highlights the individual and social processes of identity construction embedded in academics’ talk about leadership. Focusing on these processes enabled me to identify and examine a range of discursive resources (including
narratives and discourses as well as memories and desires) my participants drew on to construct their identities as certain kinds of leaders. The discursive-dialogic approach I employed in this study differs from the majority of research on leadership in HE, which tends to summarise what academics express about leadership (either in surveys or interviews) as representations of private experience or social reality. These studies have not paid sufficient attention to the discursive resources individuals draw on to make sense of their leadership, the resources that constitute not only certain identities but also certain realities for them. Having said that, my discursive-dialogic approach also differs from a number of leadership studies that investigate the effects of dominant discourses (including masculinity, neoliberalism and managerialism) in governing certain identities of ‘leaders’ (see Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Deem & Brehony, 2005). This particular sub-field of research tends to present academics’ identities as determined and regulated by these discourses as if they are the only resources individuals can draw on in their contexts.  

In contrast to these polarities of understandings, my analyses highlight the heteroglossic condition of identity construction embedded in academics’ talk (Bakhtin, 1981), that is, dominant discourses and narratives of leadership always coexist with the alternative resources individuals have developed throughout their lives. Despite recognising that some discursive resources were more prevalent in individuals’ accounts, I argue that these dominant resources are always at play with alternative and personal resources when individuals make sense of their leadership. Together these resources continuously (re)shape one another, co-constituting unique subject positions for individual academics to take up as part of their identities—including, from my analyses, certain kinds of legitimate (Chapter 5), heroic (Chapter 6), and effective (Chapter 7) leaders.

Recognising the important roles of alternative resources (as demonstrated in the last three chapters) enables us to attend to other possible ways of thinking and practising leadership in academia. This way of understanding opens up a new space for investigating not only dominant discourses of leadership, but also other discursive resources that are available to individual academics in their

64 Although it is arguable that these scholars did not explicitly state that there are no alternative discourses people can draw upon, this may be inferred from their studies.
institutional and broader contexts. These discursive resources, both dominant and alternative, render possible ways of thinking and becoming for academics as well as providing them with opportunities for resistance (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). A number of leadership scholars have provided examples of how organisation members can deploy differing forms of resistance to counter dominant discourses embedded within their working environment (Collinson, 2005; Isaac, 2011; Isaac et al., 2009). My analyses have extended this notion by illustrating that certain forms of resistance were also made possible by the dialogic relations between dominant and alternative resources. In other words, individual academics may draw on certain dominant resources that are socially recognised and accepted in their contexts, but combine them with alternative resources. For example, the narratives of altruistic hero that many academics drew on in their talk usually consisted of dominant discourses of leadership such as ‘individualism’, ‘autonomy’, and ‘masculinity’ (which are ever present in the heroic narrative), as well as alternative discourses of leadership such as ‘pastoral care’, ‘relational building’ and ‘collectivism’. Together, these resources co-constitute a range of resistant (but also compliant) identities that are not only meaningful to individual academics, but also intelligible within broader contexts. In Foucault’s (1977) terms, these academics were able to transgress the limits and boundaries of dominant discourses in idiosyncratic ways yet benefit from playing by the rules within these discourses at the same time.

Overall, the discursive resources of leadership enable individual academics to make sense of their achievements and failures, hopes and fears, passions and doubts in their everyday lives. By making sense of, and talking about, their leadership in the ways they did, these academics also took up multiple identities constituted through these discursive practices. Each individual’s identities were not necessarily coherent: indeed they were often contradictory (as I have shown especially in Chapter 7). The notion of multiple identities is important here because it highlights the nature of identity construction, which is ongoing, never completely finished and never fully coherent (Kondo, 1990). This contrasts with the majority of leadership studies in HE, which often portray academic ‘leaders’ as homogenous and univocal, with individuals’ identities as somewhat fixed and stable. Accepting leadership identities as fluid and continuously in the process of becoming enables us to recognise contradictions within others and ourselves.
without being pathologised as ‘inauthentic’ leaders (Ford & Harding, 2011). As well, it encourages us to embrace a great diversity of leaders and ways of practising leadership in academia.

In the section that follows, I discuss the practical implications of my study. I organise this section in three parts, focusing on different stakeholders, including HEIs, academics, and leadership researchers.

**Implications**

**Implications for higher education institutions**

First and foremost, HEIs should encourage individual academics to engage in an open dialogue about leadership with their colleagues, a dialogue where members’ different perspectives are celebrated and conversations among them are promoted (Bolden & Gosling, 2006). In agreement with Middlehurst and her colleagues (Middlehurst et al., 2009), my analyses reveal that there are many forms and practices of leadership that individual academics have engaged in within their everyday lives. These forms and practices include institutional and departmental leadership (serving in management and administrative roles), intellectual leadership (being a role model and helping other colleagues to develop), professional leadership (accomplishing high performance and upholding moral and professional standards), community leadership (serving the community of a professional association, academic women, and/or local community), and self-leadership (overcoming challenges and attaining self-transformation), among others. As a result, it is important for HEIs to re-evaluate their institutional policies vis-à-vis academic leadership. Overall, they need to recognise, support and reward multiple forms and practices of leadership so as to create an inclusive and democratic environment.

Recognising the diversity of leadership within the institution does not necessarily imply that all forms and practices should be accepted without questioning their...

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65 I also acknowledge here that these forms and practices of leadership are fluid, contested and interchangable depending on individuals’ interpretations.
ideologies and motivations. Differing forms and practices of leadership are often associated with particular discursive resources, which in turn shape what is thinkable, sayable and doable with respect to leadership. As discussed in Chapter 7, academics in my study often based their understanding of what is considered ‘appropriate’ leadership on what happened in their work environment. Work environments vary across large institutions and are not objective entities: rather they are socially constructed and embedded within a discursive field of power relations. Because of that, HEIs could encourage collectives of academics to explore what they understand as leadership, and how it is related to the purpose of HE. In doing so, it could facilitate a working consensus of what forms and practices of leadership are needed in HE based on a set of shared understandings among academics and their institution.

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2012) remind us, however, that it is important for organisations, including HEIs, to recognise their tendency to move towards finding a shared meaning too quickly in collective efforts, which “may trigger or increase dissensus rather than consensus” (p. 218). Under such circumstances, institutionally disadvantaged groups of academics (such as women and indigenous academics) may find their voices unheard or silenced because they do not represent the majority and/or the ‘norm’. In order to tackle and reduce this institutional inequity, I argue that HEIs need to encourage these groups to participate in a dialogue where their understandings of leadership are shared, recognised and respected among their colleagues. Moreover, the institution needs to set up a system where different forms and practices of leadership are supported without being categorised as personal or voluntary practices. This could be done by asking individual academics to identify what forms and practices of leadership they consider important for their contexts, which could be included as part of their performance evaluation.

Inequity based on gender and race/ethnicity also needs to be addressed openly within institutions. As discussed earlier, women and indigenous academics often face prejudice in relation to their leadership at work. Solving this issue does not mean promoting more women or indigenous academics to formal leadership positions or as representatives of their communities within the institution. Doing so might result in negative counter effects, as these groups of academics may
have to take on more responsibility and accountability in addition to their existing academic work. Instead, HEIs need to address their unequal systems—largely underpinned by discourses of neoliberalism and masculinity—that tend to promote and reward individualistic and competitive leaders. Following that, HEIs also need to ask what strategies of (re)distributing discursive and material resources are required in order to enable the fuller democratic participation of all its members regardless of their backgrounds and positions (Court, 2003). One possible way is to initiate multiple leadership development programmes that extend beyond formal leadership positions (such as leadership for early-career academics).

**Implications for academics**

If we accept that “almost anything and everything appears to be a form of leadership” (Spicer & Alvesson, 2011, p. 194), then what might that mean for individual academics’ talk about leadership? For many participants, having a space to talk about their leadership seemed to provide them with an opportunity to articulate their professional lives and identities, especially what they have achieved as teachers, researchers, and administrators as well as mentors, advocates and community members. Indeed, engaging in a conversation about their leadership allowed them to contemplate the meaning of their academic career, their commitment and responsibility not only to their profession but also to their students, colleagues, institution, disciplines, communities, and wider society. Thinking about leadership in this way is similar to what Macfarlane (2007b) calls academic citizenship.

Alongside this understanding, it is important to recognise that the ways in which academics talked about their leadership implicates, and is implicated by, their ongoing identity construction. As illustrated in my analyses, when talking about leadership, individual academics had to draw on discursive resources that were available to them; these resources were often taken up unproblematically as ‘the reality’. Because of this, I suggest academics may benefit from engaging in practices of reflexivity with a focus on exploring and questioning the ways they often think, talk and practise leadership. In this case, they could learn what it
means to think, talk and practise as certain kinds of leaders, and also note the constitutive effects (both material and discursive) of doing so. Sinclair (2011) argues that when our patterns of thinking, talking, and practising are made visible, it gives us the opportunity to choose whether we want to continue in our ‘normative’ ways or to experiment otherwise. Through the practices of reflexivity, academics may begin to question their own taken-for-granted versions of ‘reality’ and seek alternatives. Seeking (and also developing) new discursive resources of and around leadership may not result in immediate public acceptance because these may counter what most people would consider the norm. However, it may enable academics to become more mindful about how they relate with others in their working contexts, and what may be possible for such relationships not yet imagined.

**Implications for researchers**

My study has demonstrated the benefits of examining leadership beyond formal positions in HE. Focusing on how academics in different positions made sense of their leadership—regardless of what others might think about them—may prompt critical readers to ask about the usefulness and practicality of my data since there is no triangulation of evidence. In response, I would argue that my focus in this study is neither to prove whether these academics are ‘leaders’, nor whether their experiences of leadership are borne out in reality. I am much more interested in what made it possible for them to make sense of, and to talk about, themselves as certain kinds of leaders in academia. This means that instead of celebrating individual ‘leaders’ for their successes or pathologising them for their failures, I argue along with Alvesson and Sveningsson (2012) that researchers need to move their focus away from ‘leader centricism’ to the interplay between individuals’ experiences and the broader social, cultural and political context.

Focusing on this interplay means understanding that an individual’s experience does not reflect, but constitutes, ‘reality’ (see Davies & Davies, 2007; Nairn, 2005; Scott, 1992). Drawing on poststructural thinking, my study prompts researchers to pay greater attention to the ‘telling’ of the narrative in which individual academics are embedded within complementary and contradictory discursive
systems. Their agency is neither unified nor autonomous, but rather “created through situations and statuses conferred on them” (Scott, 1992, p. 34). Along this line, their agency is always in process through the articulation and (re)telling of their stories to selves and others, and there is always room for contradiction, renegotiation and transformation of subjectivities (Davies, 2000).

This understanding does not mean that we should ignore the material ‘realities’ of our participants’ everyday lives such as the physical and emotional conditions of their working environment. As my analyses have shown, despite confidence and strong desires to practise leadership in their work, many academics in my study referred to obstacles within their institution that discouraged their leadership practices. This difficulty, if not acknowledged, can lead to personal and professional problems for these academics – especially when considering the competitive, market-driven environment of HE at present – which sometimes results in work-related illness and/or departure from the profession (Juntrasook et al., 2013).

Having said that, it might be difficult for researchers to distance themselves from the institutional context they often share with their participants, which may cause them to accept it as the only ‘reality’ (Alvesson, 2003). Davies (2005) insists that we need to continue engaging in self-reflexivity in order to recognise what we often take for granted in our own lives. We need to also seek and develop new metaphors, images and storylines to counteract the impact of dominant discursive resources that render certain ways of thinking, talking and doing leadership possible, and not others. In our collective efforts as leadership researchers, we need to continue promoting counter-narratives of leadership, other ways of seeing and becoming, that we and our colleagues can draw on. In so doing, we may begin to realise other possibilities that enable us to think and practise otherwise, not only as leadership researchers, but also as academics and leaders.
Limitations and future research

Upon reflecting on my research practice in this study, I identified a number of limitations that constrain the findings. While acknowledging that the section ‘limitations’ has often been exploited by many researchers as a token section to avoid criticisms from the reader, I use this section as a reflective tool to problematise my study and also offer alternatives for those who might be interested to pursue a similar line of research. In this section, I consider these limitations alongside possibilities for future research that could make use of, or extend, my contribution to advancing the field of leadership in HE.

Despite evidence that all my participants made sense of and talked about themselves as leaders, this claim needs to be problematised. On the one hand, as discussed in Chapter 3, the research interview often asks participants to engage in more concentrated identity construction than they might do in their everyday lives (Alvesson, Ashcraft et al., 2008). It is arguable that my interview questions (see Appendix C) invited them to position themselves as leaders, in ways that they might not have considered before. On the other hand, since my participants self-selected to be part of this study, they may have already considered themselves as leaders prior to their participation. Although my advertisement (see Appendix A) did not exclude academics who did not consider themselves as leaders, such academics may have excluded themselves from my study.

On a broader scale, however, it is noticeable that the language of leadership has also become readily accessible in media and everyday conversation. Members of organisations are often encouraged, seduced even, to think of themselves as leaders, or leaders-in-waiting, as part of their professional identities (Spicer & Alvesson, 2011). This understanding may illuminate why my participants were able to construct themselves, one way or another, as leaders in their talk. Nevertheless, it would be interesting for future research to purposefully recruit academics who resist leadership identities, and explore their working experiences within the contemporary environment where leadership has become a default identity for all organisation members.
In terms of participant recruitment, it was difficult to recruit as many individual academics from culturally diverse backgrounds as I would have liked. My sample was predominantly Pākehā of European descent. Out of nineteen participants, only four self-identified as from indigenous backgrounds (three Māori and one Pasifika). Apart from that, all of them, including indigenous academics, had grown up in Western cultures. Admittedly, I was disappointed that there were no participants who had grown up in other cultures, including participants from Asia, South America or Africa. My disappointment was based on the premise that individuals from different ethnic/racial backgrounds might have access to different discursive resources of and around leadership (see Bolden & Kirk, 2009; Coleman, 2012; Tjeldvoll, 2011; Yang, 2011). I am aware, however, that this premise may be regarded as cultural essentialism, which tends to construct a culture as unitary and static. Bolden and Kirk (2009) contend that although culture and contextual factors may play a significant part in how leadership is constructed and enacted, we should pay greater attention to “the rhetorical and sensemaking functions of the leadership discourse in shaping identities and mobilizing action” (p. 83). Nevertheless, considering that universities in NZ have the highest percentage of international academics compared to other countries (Bönisch-Brednich, 2011), it would be interesting for future researchers to make greater efforts to recruit participants from more culturally diverse backgrounds. By doing this, researchers may be better able to explore whether embeddedness in different cultures shapes the ways in which individual academics make sense of their leadership, and how.

This study could have also benefitted from employing multiple interviews. Interviewing participants more than once might have enabled me to build stronger relationships with them, and also to generate more accounts for analyses (Kezar, 2003). My intention in initiating one-off interviews was not to record the ‘whole’ story of individual academics but rather to capture a situated ‘moment’ of telling where multiple discursive resources were at play within individuals’ narratives. However, I acknowledge that by relying on one-off interviews, I may have missed an opportunity to trace any changes in how these academics think and talk about leadership over time, especially considering that some of them relinquished their headship positions to become general academics, and vice versa. Mishler (1999) argues that multiple interviews also enable both
researchers and their participants to clarify, elaborate, and change what they have said in their first interview, hence exploring how identities also change and mobilise over a period of time. The use of multiple interviews may have provided insights into whether taking up or stepping down from formal positions impacted on academics’ understandings and practices of leadership in their everyday lives.

I would also recommend a longitudinal study for future research. This approach to study would allow researchers to investigate the rehearsed nature of talk vis-à-vis how academics continue crafting their *always incomplete* identities within the boundaries of socially established and local discursive resources available to them at different times (Taylor, 2005, 2006, 2012). It could also provide an avenue for researchers to focus on the shifting socio-economic-political environment over time and how this constitutes and alters certain discursive resources of leadership within HE contexts.

Another limitation of my study is its exclusive focus on text. By centring my focus on interview data (and institutional documents) for analyses, other potentially illuminating ways of understanding leadership in HE were left out (see the debates on this issue in Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011a, 2011b; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011; Hardy & Grant, 2012; Iedema, 2011; Mumby, 2011; Reed, 2000). In this study, I did not pay much attention to the embodiment of leadership (see Sinclair, 2005). This can include how academics ‘dress to impress’ and how body language constructs and is constructed within certain discourses and narratives as in/appropriate leadership performances in academia. I also did not explore so-called ‘reality’ outside the interviews, which could have been achieved through ethnographic methods (e.g., observation). These may have enabled an exploration of how material and relational aspects have shaped their leadership in everyday contexts. Leadership researchers can also focus on the naturally occurring conversations among academics in their everyday context. This would enable the exploration of ‘small stories’ (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), which might open up how leadership is often talked about in everyday contexts in academia.

Last but not least, there remain many narratives that I did not analyse in this study. The choices I made about what was included or excluded, although guided by my theoretical framework and analytical method, were inevitably subjective.
The way in which I conducted my research was always already informed by my cultural assumptions and the context of my life as well as by my knowledge of the field and my theoretical position in this study (Alvesson, 2002, 2003). Accordingly, only a small part of each interview appears in the analysis chapters, and some parts had to be omitted because they might have jeopardised the confidentiality of my participants. The narratives I have presented in this study, while contributing a wealth of knowledge to the field of leadership in HE, do not, and cannot, include all the possible narratives. Reading through my participants’ accounts, I recognised many other narratives that seemed to be significant to their lives but contained some identifiable materials that might implicate others outside my study. These narratives largely concerned departmental politics, including corruption, bullying and scapegoating. Future research could be undertaken to further explore these issues – ideally in a way that avoids pathologising individuals as the source of a problem.

Closing remarks

Leadership is a process of critical and compassionate engagement with the world... [It] is a commitment to challenging accepted wisdom, to reflecting deeply on our motives so as to avoid co-option, to being mindful of relations between our bodies and psyches, to being in the moment, and to leading with the intent of freeing – both the self and others. (Sinclair, 2007, p. xxiv)

I opened Chapter 2 with a narrative about changes in HE. Since I began my study, universities in NZ (along with those in other countries) have struggled to strike a balance between the government’s neoliberal agenda and their commitments to social justice, as ‘critic and conscience of society’ (Larner & Le Heron, 2005). Significant decreases in government funding in combination with fierce, market-driven competition amongst institutions have significantly altered the landscape of HE on both global and local scales (Marginson, 2004). Whether we, academics, choose to follow neoliberal principles or stand against them, the effects of the economic downturn and educational ‘failure’ around the world continue to haunt us. Over the past century, we have come to realise the vulnerability of our profession – a recognition that we have little control over
institutional policy, government funding, or the security of our employment and the conditions under which we labour. As a result, a call for 'effective' leadership has often been justified as a promise to rescue us from our institutional and professional crises. Despite numerous efforts and research programmes across countries, this promise is yet to deliver. Instead of searching for the holy grail of 'effective' leadership, I suggest it is timely for HEIs to recognise and support the coexistence of multiple forms and practices of leadership offered by individual members. Accordingly, this recognition of diversity will create a more socially just and democratic workplace, which will benefit not only individual members but also the institution as a whole.

Despite my somewhat pessimistic tone throughout this study, I do believe that changes are possible. At my own institution there have been a few changes, for better and for worse, since I began this study. The university has recently appointed a new vice-chancellor who is the first woman to occupy this position in the history of this institution. A number of academics I interviewed have been promoted to formal leadership positions while some have stepped down from these roles. Some have received national and institutional awards for their achievements. And some have resigned and moved away to other universities or into the public sector. These changes remind us that despite constraints in our lives, there are always possibilities for change. Life surprises us; it is never fully completed, never fully finalised.

Upon revisiting my own journey throughout this study, I have also recognised changes in myself, as both an academic and a person. Growing up in a country where a strongly hierarchical structure is normative, dictatorship is acceptable, and our national leader is often considered a joke, I had little faith in leadership. Yet, my study has transformed my own beliefs. During the last three years, I have come across some interesting work from leadership scholars who taught me new ways of thinking about leadership in academia and beyond. Their work also challenged my assumptions and prompted me to confront my own ignorance.

Learning about social constructionism, along with poststructuralism and Bakhtinian concepts, has also changed the way I see the world. I have become more aware of my own judgements towards others and myself, as well as power
relations in institutions, and life in general. As mentioned in Chapter 7, engaging in analytical processes propelled me to think about my own experience and understandings of leadership, the way I often took certain things for granted as reality. I have become more aware that there are always stories behind people’s thoughts, talk, and actions: stories that can be told and untold. Despite my imperfect being, this notion has become a reminder for me to be less judgemental of others and myself.

As this study comes to an end, I feel compelled to close it with some authoritative words – words that might finalise my study and enable me to take up the position of a ‘knower’ in the field. But this would contradict the foundation of my study, a resistance to a sense of closure, as Bakthin (1984) would say. So instead, I would like to advance a more humble aspiration. I hope that those who are interested in leadership in academia or elsewhere have found something in this study interesting and relevant to their own journey. Better still, I hope that some of my readers will want to inquire further, to advance my point or prove it insufficient. I hope that when we see, think, and talk about our own or somebody’s leadership, we might also recognise our common narratives and discourses, the discursive resources that we unwittingly draw on, and how they have prevented us from seeing the world differently. As one of my participants said, “there are a million different ways to be a leader”, so perhaps we should continue to ask ourselves why we might think our ways are better than others?
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Appendices
Appendix A

Advertisement for participant recruitment
Have you ever thought of your own leadership at work?

How have you developed and practised it in your everyday life as an academic?

Do you have some stories to share?

Call for participants

I would like to invite full-time academics from all ranks, disciplines, ethnicities, social and cultural backgrounds to participate in my doctoral project on leadership in academic life*.

My project aims to explore how academics, like you, experience their own leadership within and beyond the context of their professional life. It does not matter whether you have ever been in a formal leader/administrator position, or if your definition of leadership is different from others. What I am interested in is the diversity and uniqueness of experiences and understandings of leadership from individual academics.

Participants will be asked to share some stories about their career path, with a particular focus on how they have developed and practised leadership throughout their academic career.

If you would like to share your stories and be a part of this project please contact me. Interviews will take place at a time and place convenient to you.

For further information please contact:
Adisorn Juntrasook, PhD Candidate, Higher Education Development Centre
Phone: xx xxx xxxx Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

* This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee
Appendix B

Information sheet and consent form for participants
LEADERSHIP WITH/OUT POSITION

RE-SEARCHING LEADERSHIP IN ACADEMIC WORK

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

The aim of this project is to explore how academics experience and understand their own leadership and its development in their academic work, with a particular focus on how social and historical context (including personal/professional background) may influence these experiences and understandings.

This project will seek about 15 participants who are employed full-time as lecturers or senior lecturers or associate professors or professors (with regular responsibility for teaching, research and service) by the University of Otago, across a broad range of personal and professional backgrounds. The selection of participants, with its goal of maximal variation, will be made regarding to the variables of individuals (including gender, discipline, academic ranking, and ethnicity) without attempting to attain statistical representativeness.

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview of about one to one and a half hours long.

The interview will focus on:

- Your biography (including personal and professional backgrounds)
- Your experiences and understandings of your own leadership and its development in academic work

Should you be willing, you will also be asked to provide your curriculum vitae and a sample of your documents relating to your employment (e.g., teaching profile). These documents will provide secondary sources for the researcher to use alongside the data generated from the interview in order to make sense about your career path.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind. You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

The primary data will be collected through semi-structured interviews. These interviews will be transcribed verbatim and returned to participants for commenting on how the conversation has been captured and to provide any further thoughts that have arisen since the interview. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.
These data are being collected to understand more about the experiences and understandings of academics upon their own leadership in their academic work. Only the researcher and supervisors will have access to these data. These data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned above will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University’s research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secured storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Results of this project may be published but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

The results will be shared amongst the higher education community through web resources, presentations and other publications, and will also be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand). No personal information will be published and every attempt will be made to anonymise data. Each participant will be allocated a pseudonym. Other strategies will be used to maintain anonymity. For example, pseudonyms may be changed during the course of research and reporting to prevent identification through tracking individuals.

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Adisorn Juntrasook (Doctoral Research Student)
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Or

Dr. xxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx (Primary Supervisor)
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph xx xxx xxxx). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
LEADERSHIP WITH/OUT POSITION

RE-SEARCHING LEADERSHIP IN ACADEMIC WORK

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. Personal identifying information in an audio-recorder will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed;
4. This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes my biography, experiences and understandings of my own leadership in my academic work. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind;
5. I agree to the recording of the interview;
6. The results will be shared amongst the higher education community through web resources, presentations and other publications, and will also be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand). No personal information will be published and every attempt will be made to anonymise my personal data;
7. I understand that reasonable precautions have been taken to protect data transmitted by email but that the security of the information cannot be guaranteed.

I agree to take part in this project.

.................................................... .................................................... ...................................................
(Name of participant) (Signature of participant) (Date)

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph xx xxx xxxx). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix C

Questions for interview
Questions for interview

On biographical and general understanding of academic background

- How did you become an academic?
  
  o How did you end up working here at [The University]

- How has your career been so far since you started it?

On understanding of leadership in academia

- In terms of your academic career, what does leadership mean to you?

On leadership development (becoming)

- Can you think of a time since you started your career when you had to exercise your leadership?
  
  o What happened?
  
  o How did you respond to that?

- Since then, are there any particular changes or developments that you have recognised in terms of your own leadership (such as your understanding about it or your style of exercising it)?
  
  o And what are they?
  
  o If not, then...

  o Otherwise, can you tell me what are the most important aspects of leadership that have stayed with you since then?

- Are there any particular events, periods of time, or persons that have influenced your leadership in academia?
  
  o Who and what are they?
  
  o What did you learn from them?
On practicing as an academic leader (doing)

- Now let’s talk about your academic work: Is leadership expected in your work? In what way?
- Can you tell me how you exercise your leadership in terms of teaching?
- What about in terms of research?
- And what about in terms of service?
  - Are there any particular areas beyond teaching, research and service within the university that you have contributed to in terms of your leadership?

On institutional context

- So far, how’s working here at [The University] in terms of your leadership?
  - Does the working environment help or support your leadership?
  - Are there any barriers in the working environment to supporting or developing your leadership?
- Does The University or your department expect any kind of leadership from you?
  - In what way?

On being a leader in academia (and beyond)

- Do you think people here see you as a leader in some way?
  - How do they see you?
  - How do you feel about that?
  - Are there any particular experiences that made you feel that way?
On personal context

- Would it be OK if I ask about your personal life in terms of how it affects your leadership in academia?
  
  o Are there any challenges or supports you get outside the university in terms of your leadership?

On broader social context

- Now let’s talk about some broader context: Are there any particular changes in society (or in higher education, or even in your discipline) that have affected you and your leadership?

- And what are your roles in terms of leadership in response to those changes?
Appendix D

List of publications from this thesis
List of publications from this thesis

**Refereed journal articles:**


Juntrasook, A. (in press). ‘You don’t have to be the boss to be a leader’: Contested meanings of leadership in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*.

**Refereed abstracts of conference proceedings:**


