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The Undoing of Identity in Leadership Development

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ABSTRACT

Leadership development theory and practice is increasingly turning its gaze on identity as a primary focus of development efforts. This thesis investigates the processes, practices, and tensions that participants experience when called to work upon their identity in the name of leadership development. It argues that current leadership development research focuses on identity construction, acquisition, and maintenance and therefore how identities can be enlarged, evolved, stabilised, and strengthened. This reflects a pattern found more broadly in organisation studies, where identity work is primarily theorised as involving construction, maintenance, and regulation. Whilst these are important insights, this thesis focuses on a collection of identity work practices that are underdeveloped in the literature: the deconstruction, unravelling, destabilising, letting go, and loss that can be experienced in the pursuit of work upon one's self. I group these experiences, amongst others, under the conceptual term "undoing". I position this term as a kaleidoscopic concept and describe seven different ways in which it manifests.

This thesis centres on an ethnographic study of an 18-month leadership development programme based in New Zealand. It draws on material gathered from face-to-face observations, written reflection assignments, and thousands of online postings recorded on a virtual learning platform. Informed by social constructionism, particular attention is given to the discursive analysis of interactions in order to explore the relational nature of identity undoing.

Whilst it may appear that this thesis proposes to refocus identity work research from construction to undoing, I instead encourage a dialectical understanding of the two in order to explore how they "inhabit each other" (Cooper, 1989, p. 483). This thesis concludes by deconstructing this binary opposition as well as two others (facilitator/participant and care/criticism) that are vital to the existence of undoing efforts in leadership development. As a result, I offer a range of theoretical and practical implications for leadership development and identity research.

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INTRODUCTION

The smell of coffee draws to an end the morning's session. The participants huddle together in clusters, dunking tea bags, snacking on muffins, and excitedly relaying stories from the 6 a.m. exercise session in the darkened rain. They have only known each other for just over 24 hours, and already some are talking like old friends, while others seem shier and more reserved. It is the second day of the first workshop, and an 18-month leadership development journey stretches out before them. As the conversation moves between debating the leadership theories from the morning's session (cautiously, so as not to offend one another), to war stories from their leadership endeavours, one participant talks about why he joined the programme. Oscar says, "I feel like I'm at a stage in my life where I'd like to do some work on myself, to study myself a bit more, in a supportive environment. And who better to do this personal development with than the best leadership minds in the country. You know?" Along with the others, I nod and feel like I should, but I am not sure that I do.

As day three of the first workshop reluctantly wraps up, I sit amongst a group of three participants who are asked to share their feelings about the nature of leadership development so far. Sally says to her group, "I feel like they're [the facilitators] blowing everything to smithereens. It's shaken up everything I know, like I've been put in a tumble dryer." Eventually, the groups join back together to share some of these reflections. As I scribble down the dialogue, a facilitator says, "there is loss in development. You become different. Identity is fundamental to leadership." I underline this quote.

There are numerous stories this thesis could have told, but it is in these two snapshots of dialogue that this thesis began. Each story raises a series of cascading questions that have

shaped the intent and production of this thesis. Oscar confirmed what I suspected, that some people enlist in leadership development programmes in order to do concentrated work upon their self under the reputable name of an institution and the expertise of facilitators. This inclusion of the self in leadership development, of personal development in the name of leadership development, is perhaps no surprise given the institutions that preceded leadership development. Various historical antecedents, such as T-Groups, the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, management development, and management gurus and self-help books, have invited and positioned the self as a vital and legitimate target for development efforts, albeit to different degrees and using different approaches. So whilst it may be natural to take for granted that work upon the self is essential to develop oneself as a leader, such an assumption has never sat comfortably with me. Rather, it is an enduring tension that initially piqued my interest in writing a doctoral thesis, and is captured in the question, why has leadership development become one of the preferred settings in which to do personal development? This question is a useful starting point from which to explain why leadership development is an important site for academic research.

Leadership development is now a multi-billion-dollar global industry. Some estimate that between 15 and 50 billion US dollars is spent annually on leadership development around the globe (Grint, 2007), and in one UK study, around 82% of surveyed organisations use some form of leadership development initiative (Ford, Harding, & Learmonth, 2008). These figures suggest the potential impact that leadership development programmes may be having on contemporary organisational life, and for this reason they are worthy of further academic scrutiny. This demand for leadership development could be the result of a series of changes to work and the workplace ignited by post-industrialism (Casey, 1995), new forms of capitalism (Sennett, 1998), post-bureaucracy (Garsten & Grey, 1997), neo-liberalism (Hayek, 1944),

post-modernism (K. J. Gergen, 1991), and an expertise of subjectivity (Rose, 1999). These changes have apparently destabilised the worker's sense of a sustained and coherent narrative of the self (Sennett, 1998). While the workplace is commonly thought of as a site where individuals can attempt to repair and stabilise this disrupted self, according to Oscar, leadership development is now the best place to do this identity work ("who better to do this with . . ."). Leadership development sites are perhaps one of the "places of retreat to which we flee" (Scott, 2010, p. 213) in order to deal with ontological and existential crises of late modernity. If we accept the claim that leadership development programmes are more likely to be entrusted as an identity workspace than the workplace (J. L. Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010), then this cements the importance of researching such a setting, especially given this setting has received "scant attention" from academic scrutiny (Scott, 2010, p. 213). The question here becomes, what is the nature of identity work undertaken in this context?

While only a handful of publications directly explore identity work and leadership development, some of this literature positions leadership development as a sanctuary for identity stabilisation and repair. However, it can also have the opposite effect: leadership development may trigger "uncertainty, anxiety, questioning or self-doubt" (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008, p. 15), and compel "more concentrated identity work" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626). It appears that leadership development research is mirroring identity research more broadly, which focuses on how identities are constructed, enlarged, protected, and regulated. Whilst these are valuable insights, my research participants seem to suggest that there is more going on than what is currently portrayed in the academic literature. Sally's hyperbolic and catastrophic feeling that she has been "blown to smithereens" refers to moments of identity disintegration and fragmentation – experiences that stand in stark contrast to the language of acquisition, stabilisation, and construction. The

facilitator's belief that there is "loss in development" jars with assumptions in the literature that leadership development is about acquisition and gain. It seems that an individual's identity can be unsettled and disrupted in ways that the leadership development and identity literature has not yet articulated, but needs to if it aspires to be relevant to those involved in undertaking leadership development. Consequently, this thesis explores a series of alternative identity work practices, grouping them under the term "undoing". In doing so, I address a recent call for research that addresses the theoretical need to conceptualize the practices of identity work, particularly in relation to identity change (Beech, 2011). Therefore, the specific research question for this thesis is, how are identities undone in leadership development programmes?

Undoing is a kaleidoscopic word. On the one hand it means to open up, to unfasten; it also means to do away with or reverse; and at the more extreme end it means to destroy or ruin ("Random House Dictionary," 2010). In terms of identity work, this word "undoing" refers to the unfastening and unravelling of one's identity, the processes of letting go or discarding identities, and the moments when our identity may feel splintered or destroyed. A sustained theorisation of undoing as a concept does not seem to exist in academic literature; therefore, this thesis contributes to theory by offering a conceptualisation of undoing that goes beyond its dictionary definition to include seven different ways in which undoing can manifest. While it may sound more appealing to focus primarily on a term like identity de(con)struction, my hope in using the word undoing is to capture the multitude of ways in which identity work is experienced, rather than obscuring this variety for the sake of one provocative term.

Following Judith Butler (2004), this thesis is interested in how undoing is created relationally in interactions between people. Returning to Oscar and Sally, their dialogue alerts us to the role of facilitators and participants in doing “work on myself”. Oscar describes them as “the best leadership minds in the country”, who can assist him with his personal development, therefore suggesting that facilitators are experts of subjectivity (Rose, 1999). Sally suggests that the facilitators have an ability to shake up (or at the more extreme end, to blow apart) one’s knowledge and identity. However, whilst some theorists would position facilitators as the powerful experts who destroy and re-form the vulnerable and naive participants, such a reading obscures the subtlety of how power can operate. This is not to deny that this positioning does not exist, but rather to acknowledge that both participants and facilitators create and work with dynamics of undoing. Therefore, this thesis explores the variety of ways in which undoing is created and worked with in interactions between individuals, with a sensitivity to the consequences of this undoing.

In order to explore these research questions, I have undertaken an ethnographic study of an 18-month leadership development programme run by a university-affiliated leadership research and development centre based in New Zealand. Thirty participants from across New Zealand and from different sectors and organisations began and completed the programme, supported by six facilitators. The leadership development organisation travels under the pseudonym Atlas Institute, and the programme is referred to as the Catalyst Programme. It is important to emphasise that leadership development programmes run by Atlas Institute are strongly informed by social construction theory and practice. Therefore, leadership is seen as relational, contextual, discursive, negotiated, and ambiguous (i.e. Grint, 2005). Concepts such as sense-making (Weick, 1995), adaptive leadership (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), and leadership-as-practice (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008) are explicitly taught. Importantly,

such an orientation means that identity work is a central part of leadership and its development: participants are strongly encouraged to experiment with crafting and altering their leadership identity. Specific content sessions centred on explaining and using this concept of identity work, and the facilitators often invited and reminded participants to practise it in interactions. In addition, Atlas Institute draws on some aspects of critical management education concepts, such as challenging participants to interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions, to ask interrogative questions, and to construct multiple perspectives of a given situation.

I have done what I call a hybrid ethnography as I traverse two different social worlds: the physical world of interspersed face-to-face residential workshops, and the virtual world of an online forum that forms the backbone of the development process. I draw on material gathered from these two settings, such as face-to-face observations of five residential workshops, thousands of online postings and interactions recorded on the online learning platform, and document analysis of the participants' written reflection assignments. Doing an ethnography has always been important to me as it enables me to explore the "incoherence, variation, and fragmentation" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 378) of identity work and leadership development that can be missed by cross-sectional or interview-based methods.

Beginning this thesis with a sequence of interactions is a deliberate indication of the way I work with empirical material. That is, I prefer to work with empirical material by stringing together a series of interactions in order to explore how undoing manifests between people over the duration of the programme. Such an approach highlights my assumption that undoing is relational, discursive, and is best captured through exploring the moments in which it occurs, rather than relying solely on interview-based reconstructions and memories.

While interactions form the bulk of the empirical material presented in this thesis, I also include slices of talk as well as written narratives or metaphors. My decision to use discourse analysis to make sense of the data was by no means predetermined. After the first few months of fieldwork, I realised how leadership development programmes are a “speech communit[y]” (Barley, 1983, as cited in Samra-Fredericks, 2008) whose inhabitants “dwell in language” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 198). It seemed necessary therefore to use a discursive form of analysis.

The exploratory and interactional attitude evident in my methodology is also a metaphor for how I work with academic literature. The first three chapters of this thesis can be read as a series of conversations between different writers, fields, and epistemologies, in which I foreground the assumptions, contributions, and ultimately the lesser-explored terrains which mark the contributions this thesis makes.

Chapter 1 targets contemporary leadership development literature with a view to analyse the various perspectives framing the field. I use the analytical framework provided by Carroll and Levy (2010) that dissects the field into functionalist, constructivist, and constructionist approaches. Each carries with it a particular interpretation of leadership, development, and identity. As a result of this review, it becomes apparent that the majority of leadership development literature focuses on development as the acquisition and/or refinement of leadership skills and competencies, and as an evolutionary journey through stages of progression. I suggest that this focus needs to be balanced by an exploration of the alternative movements also involved in development hinted at by some writers (i.e. play, letting go, and disembedding). The concept of undoing offers one way of strengthening these voices.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, is tasked with discussing the particular orientation to identity – social constructionism – informing this thesis and the Atlas Institute. I acknowledge that there are a variety of approaches to this complex perspective, therefore this chapter represents my interpretation of a social constructionist approach to identity. I then analyse the language of identity research carried out by organisational scholars who operate with this orientation. It seems that identity research is currently dominated by talk of construction, acquisition, maintenance, and regulation. These framings do not seem to fully capture the experiences of my research participants, and indeed seem antithetic to the movements involved in being undone (i.e. loosen up, let go, and destroy). Therefore, I suggest undoing offers a new and alternative conceptualisation of identity work.

In Chapter 3, I explain this term undoing by bringing together theory from a variety of disciplines. In doing so, I capture seven experiences which undoing can refer to: unsettling; “negative magic”; unfastening; shedding; loss; stripping back; and destroying. In addition, I draw on Judith Butler (2004) who situates undoing as an undeniably relational experience, one that can be worked with in a variety of ways, and is a fundamental part of the human condition.

Chapter 4 fixes its gaze upon the epistemological and ontological influences central to this thesis. This thesis uses a social construction paradigm not only to understand identity but, as I explain in this chapter, the research process too. In particular, I detail a form of constructionism influenced by critical management studies and discourse. I elaborate upon the assumptions of this perspective and the implications for my methodology.

Chapter 5 centres on the more technical aspects of my methodology. I use the term “hybrid ethnography” to signal the blend between the traditional (face-to-face) and virtual (online)

worlds I research. I also describe the research context, Atlas Institute and the Catalyst Programme, as well as my role as a researcher. This chapter spends time specifying the various forms of data collection I have accessed, and my approach to discourse analysis.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 are where method and data interact to form my findings chapters. These chapters are structured around seven discourses of identity undoing constructed from the empirical material. That is, I propose that undoing one's identity can involve movements such as: "opening up", "floundering", "play", "shaking up", "cutting apart", "letting go", and "slipping back". The structure of these chapters oscillates between a more energising discourse and a more debilitating one to evoke the rising and falling movements that seem central to experiencing undoing and leadership development.

Chapter 9 retreats from the mire of detailed data and connects with academic literature in order to explore what undoing means for leadership development and identity theory. In particular, I structure this chapter around three binary oppositions that pervade the data and provide avenues for theorisation – namely, construction/undoing, facilitator/participant, and care/criticality.

In a thesis all about undoing, the concluding chapter represents an attempt to wrap up the main contributions of this thesis and consider the implications for theory, practice, and future research. Whilst the relevance and impact of research can feel precarious, my hope is that this research gives voice to some alternative ways in which facilitators and participants experience identity work. In doing so, I hope it goes some way toward helping facilitators understand and negotiate the expectations and desires that participants may have to be undone, as well as invite those facilitators to reflect upon their role in undoing others. It may also provide some assistance in how to incorporate more effective forms of undoing in

development, and how to negotiate the more debilitating forms. I hope it encourages participants to examine their expectations of leadership development programmes and facilitators, and their responsibility in their own and others' identity work. I hope it provides a starting point for organisations that use leadership development programmes to consider how they can better support their employees who may be negotiating some of these identity dynamics. Finally, I hope this thesis encourages both leadership development and identity scholars to continue investigating the variety of different ways in which identity work is experienced, with a particular commitment to looking for contradictory, antithetical, and kaleidoscopic conceptualisations. I appreciate that such hopes may be lofty; however, the feeling remains that only when they are in some way fulfilled will this thesis have been a worthy endeavour.

CHAPTER 1

Contemporary Approaches to Leadership Development

Writers commonly introduce their overviews of leadership development research and practice by saying that interest in this field exploded in the last 20 or so years (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004) and “appears to be at its zenith” (Day, 2001, p. 581). To justify the continued interest in leadership development research, various writers specify the billions of dollars spent on leadership development, or cite survey results indicating increasing demand for leadership development. Despite this interest, some claim there is no comprehensive theory of leadership development (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009). This chapter is not concerned with justifying the untiring attention; rather, it explores the various perspectives that frame leadership development literature. Several writers have offered different typologies (i.e. Conger, 1992; Day, 2001); however, I use Carroll and Levy’s (2010) categorisation of functionalist, constructivist, and social constructionist approaches to leadership development. Within each of these perspectives, I focus on the assumptions regarding leadership development and identity and analyse the language of the literature with a view to understanding how leadership development is currently constructed.

Functionalist Approaches to Leadership Development

Functionalist approaches represent an approach to leadership development interested in building a tool box of skills, abilities, and techniques in order to be a more effective leader (Carroll & Levy, 2010). Using Aristotle, Grint (2007) calls this approach *techne* or know-how, whereby leadership training is used to fix problems of inadequacy and deficiency in the leader’s technical skill sets: the leader’s tool box is topped up. Grint calls these forms of training “symptom relievers rather than cause removers” (2007, p. 235). Writers following

this perspective attempt to capture “best practices” in leadership development and provide 5-step recipes for implementing such practices (i.e. Fulmer & Goldsmith, 2001).

Perhaps the most exemplary writers from this perspective are Jay Conger (1992) and Robert Lord and Rosalie Hall (2005). Conger’s often-cited book, *Learning to Lead*, identifies four main ways that leadership can be developed: conceptual, skill-building, personal growth, and feedback approaches. Conger is critical of the purpose and design of leadership development in the period he was writing, and is particularly critical of the organisations that use the programmes because they “do not want more leaders. They prefer managers” (pp. 190–1). Conger advocates the use of skill building and personal growth approaches to improve leadership development. This means programmes should be “devoted to teaching concrete, observable, measurable skills” (p. 191). Personal growth approaches “offer us powerful tools” such as fostering change, developing greater vision, and building self-esteem (p. 191). Conger believes that leadership development can be aligned with an organisation’s vision and strategy and is essential to business excellence and competitive advantage. As such, effort is made to link leadership development practices with cost savings and other indicators of success (Conger, 1992).

Using cognitive science literature, Lord and Hall (2005) offer a matrix of leadership skill development which they propose targets change at a “deeper level” (p. 592) than the more surface trait approaches. The assumption here seems to be that identity sits below skills acquisition, or is the internal core of the person, and if it can be accessed will accelerate leader development (Day et al., 2009). Leadership development is described as a “cognitive bootstrapping process” in which micro-level skills are developed through observation and experience and are eventually arranged into “higher level systems that guide behaviour,

knowledge, and social perceptions” (Lord & Hall, 2005, p. 592). This matrix argues that leaders progress along three levels of skill acquisition and performance (novice, intermediate, and expert) in regard to six leadership skill domains: task, emotional, social, identity, meta-monitoring, and value orientation. Each skill level emphasises different abilities to process knowledge and information. For example, in terms of emotional skills, a novice leader is able to mimic and express emotional behaviour, whereas an expert leader is able to regulate others’ emotions, respond to others’ emotions appropriately, and integrate self-knowledge with emotional expression.

In order to know what problems to fix, or tools to add to the tool box, functionalist approaches to leadership development itemise the skills which need to be developed. Often this is predicated on differentiating leadership skills from management skills (Fulmer & Goldsmith, 2001; Conger, 1992). With the knowledge of the skills which need to be developed, other writing centres on describing activities which will develop these skills, such as role modelling, multi-source feedback, action learning, and so on (see Murphy & Riggio, 2003; Yukl, 2010). Avolio (2010, p. 763) talks about identifying “formulas for what constitutes optimal leadership development”, an assumption that is epitomised in the following leadership development equation: “Feedback intensive programme + skill-based training + 360-degree feedback + developmental relationships + hardships = leadership development” (McCauley et al., 1998, as cited in Kempster, 2009, p. 95).

Such an equation suggests leadership development under this approach is “a matter of mechanics” (Hotho & Dowling, 2010, p. 610). The preceding quote illustrates Hotho and Dowling’s (2010) critique of contemporary thinking about leadership development design and implementation which “remains rooted in an overly techno-rational and functional

perspective . . . which assumes an overly linear and causal relation between pedagogic input and output, learning and application” (p. 610). Programme designers draw on a “pre-set pedagogy” with little concern for individual and contextual differences (Hotho & Dowling, 2010, p. 610).

Recent functionalist writing has focused on how to transfer learning from the off-site classroom to the workplace (Yukl, 2010). Such a focus on building one’s skills means that much of the functionalist research is focused on individual leader development (Day, 2001; Yukl, 2010), although there is an increasing attentiveness to contextual demands such as globalisation, workforce diversity, business ethics (Murphy & Riggio, 2003), and *leadership* development (Day, 2001).

Similar language and assumptions are evident in functionalist literature which addresses the role of identity in leadership development. According to Carroll and Levy (2010), functionalist approaches “renders identity effectively as another tool . . . that can be mobilized for greater personal and organizational performance” (p. 216). As this research follows a nomothetic approach to the self (O’Doherty, 2007) writers are more likely to use the terms personality, individual differences, or self-concept than identity (which is more commonly associated with an idiographic understanding of the self). For example, the research conducted by Atwater and colleagues (1999) attempts to identify the individual differences which will predict effectiveness in leadership emergence and development. Similar research uses the language of specific, universal competencies which leaders “need to possess to be effective” (Riggio, 2008, p. 384) in leadership development programmes, such as readiness and desire to learn. The language of prediction and effectiveness, combined with a quantitative research design, exemplify Carroll and Levy’s claim above.

Again, Lord and Hall's research (2005) is representative of the functionalist perspective towards identity. The authors segregate identity into different levels (individual, relational, and collective) along which leaders may progress throughout their development (from novice to intermediate to expert leaders). The more "expert" one is in their identity, the more "inextricably integrated" leadership skills and knowledge are with "one's self concept" (p. 592). Identity here is seen as an "internal resource" that leaders are more capable of "drawing on" when they move from novice to expert (p. 592). Successful leadership development eventuates when leadership skills are integrated with the identity of a leader, which will result in "an expert and unique manner of leading" (p. 611). A novice leader has an individual-level identity as they focus more on "demonstrating uniqueness" and "differentiating oneself" from other leaders in order to be "recognized and accepted as leaders" (p. 596). A leader operating with an intermediate skill level has more of a relational identity as they include other individuals in their identity processing. Expert leaders apparently have collective identities that are "sensitive to the follower context", authentic, and able to enact alternative identities (p. 597). Such an approach to leadership development perhaps illustrates Jones' (2006) belief that American researchers and practitioners are "obsessed" with developing a "science of the self" (p. 483) for leadership development.

The language of functionalist leadership development research tends to use verbs such as acquire (i.e. acquiring competencies, Yukl, 2010), expand (i.e. "the expansion of a person's capacity" in Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004, p. 2), enhance (i.e. "enhancing metacognitive ability" in Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004, p. 220), build (i.e. skill building, Conger, 1992), receive (i.e. receiving feedback, Conger, 1992), and gain (i.e. as in gaining awareness, Conger, 1992). Throughout Lord and Hall's article (2005), words such as progression, grounding, solidifies, integrate, change, acquisition, and adopt portray the type of actions

involved when working upon one's identity. Given that functionalist development writing and practice starts with an assumption of "a deficit model" (Grint, 2007, p. 234) of the individual, it is no surprise that their language centres on synonyms of acquisition and progression.

Constructivist Approaches to Leadership Development¹

Constructivist approaches recognise that skills acquisition is not enough for leadership and its development (G. Petriglieri, in press). They usually adopt a psychological perspective (Avolio, 1999; London, 2002) and consequently hold assumptions of development as cognitive, linear, and evolutionary (Carroll & Levy, 2010). Some writers recognise and investigate the contextual demands and implications that shape and constrain leadership development – to a certain extent (Hotho & Dowling, 2010). Iles and Preece (2006) align a constructivist view with what Day (2001) terms leadership (rather than leader) development, and therefore place emphasis on the processual and collective nature of development; although the extent to which this is achieved is contestable (Day & O'Conner, 2003).

One of the main theoretical influences in this approach is the adult developmental theory created by Robert Kegan and colleagues (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Kegan recently joined with Lisa Lahey to write a chapter that connects adult development and leadership (Kegan & Lahey, 2010). Kegan's theory assumes that human beings can be plotted along a model of evolution, and therefore "if you want to understand another person in some fundamental way you must know where the person is in his or her evolution" (Kegan, 1982, p. 114). Kegan's 6-stage model of adult development represents an individual's progressive evolution of meaning-making or what Erikson calls their "evolving consciousness" (2006, p. 290).

¹ As outlined by Carroll and Levy (2010), there is contestation over whether and how constructivism and constructionism are actually different. I adopt their distinction with an awareness of this debate.

Differing from some functionalist writers, Kegan assumes that humans construct a subjective understanding of their world (Day & O’Conner, 2003). Two people can construct different interpretations from an identical event due to the level or stage they are at in their development: individuals at a higher “order of consciousness” will be more advanced and sophisticated in their meaning-making than those at a lower level (Day & O’Conner, 2003, p. 17).

Following Kegan’s work, constructivist leadership development approaches tend to emphasise the cognitive aspects of knowledge acquisition and application (Kempster, 2009). Kempster, for example, argues that memory is a key aspect of leadership learning. Using a social-psychology lens, he argues leadership development may be attentive to the contextual, social, and relational nature of leadership learning. Despite Kegan’s protest that his 6-stage model is open to emotions, constructive leadership development theory tends not to address the emotive or embodied nature of learning: it is the mind in the lived-in world (Kempster, 2009).

Kegan also argues that individuals are continuously growing and changing as they attempt to disembody themselves from one way of knowing and progress to a higher level of complexity (Day & O’Conner, 2003). This transition to a higher order eventuates when an individual can “free themselves” (Day & O’Conner, 2003, p. 17) from a principle that is “subject” (i.e. implicit aspects of identity that an individual is not aware of and therefore cannot control or reflect upon), to holding it instead as an “object” (i.e. is explicit and can be controlled, reflected upon, and operated on). This language assumes that an individual has a high degree of cognitive control and mastery over their development. Day and O’Conner (2003) draw upon Kegan’s work to support their call for a science of leadership development. They argue

that his adult development theory is a promising theoretical framework that would provide greater order and understanding for the field; however, they recognise that it focuses on individual (i.e. leader) development rather than *leadership* development.

Constructivist literature tends to regard identity as “unitary, cognitive, linear, ordered, essentialist, and internal” (Carroll & Levy, 2010, p. 216). It may differentiate between personal and social identity in order to understand self-awareness and leadership development (i.e. Hall, 2004). Given this primarily psychological view of identity, some scholarship describes activities and techniques which enable participants to access and reflect upon their self, such as individual sessions with a psychotherapist (G. Petriglieri, Wood, & Petriglieri, 2010), autobiographical writing (G. Petriglieri, in press), and 360-degree feedback (Hall, 2004). Recently, more attention is being given to the influence of life experiences from early childhood and young adulthood on leadership effectiveness in development (Murphy & Reichard, 2011).

Some constructivist writers produce models of identity development, in the hope that individuals can identify their current stage, in order to progress to the next stage. Van Velsor and Drath’s (2004) lifelong developmental framework, used by the Center for Creative Leadership, is exemplary here. Based on Kegan’s adult development theory, Van Velsor and Drath identify self-reading, self-authoring, and self-revising as three prime identity development stages an individual can progress along. These stages reflect their metaphor of the self as a book that can be read, written, or continuously revised. Self-reading describes the “immature” stage in which an individual’s core identity is determined by the ideas and judgements of other people – they “read the book of his identity” (p. 389). Self-authoring is the next stage in which the person writes their own book of their identity, independent of

what others think or say. They have found their true, inner self. Self-revising is the ultimate stage where the person continuously revises and rewrites their sense of self in relation to their environment.

Van Velsor and Drath's (2004) metaphor is predicated on several assumptions. The first is that life is far more complex and complicated than in decades gone by (when self-reading would have been sufficient). These contemporary demands and challenges from both work and personal life call for a different kind of development – specifically the ability to self-author (for those in management positions), and self-revise (for those in leadership/senior management positions). Development therefore requires a lifelong commitment to pursuing a transformation from the self-reading to self-authoring stage, as this results in “a whole new way of understanding oneself and one's life” (Van Velsor & Drath, 2004, p. 397). Lastly, they place the responsibility for this transformation squarely at the feet of the individual. Each individual “authors the book of her identity” (Van Velsor & Drath, 2004, p. 389) independent of the judgements, reactions, ideas, and values of others. This unhindered agency is problematic because if an individual is responsible for this progression, they may be expected therefore to take ownership of their struggles and failures to achieve it.

In their constructivist chapter “Identity-Based Leader Development”, Ibarra, Snook, and Guillen-Ramo (2010) argue that leadership development is “ultimately about facilitating an identity transition” (p. 673). The development of leadership skills is seen to be intricately connected with the development of one's self-concept as a leader. Their article describes how identity transformation can be created in leadership development programmes. It is assumed that this identity transformation a) happens to all those involved in leadership development, and b) is necessary in order to succeed in leadership development. They rely upon liminality

theory to describe their evolutionary identity transition process, summarised in the following quote: “leader development unfolds as an identity transition in which people disengage from central, behaviourally anchored identities whilst exploring new possible selves, and eventually, integrating a new, alternative identity” (Ibarra et al., 2010, p. 662).

The preceding quote suggests that participants in development programmes work upon their identity by disengaging from ingrained identities in order to explore new selves, and eventually integrating these. Identity work therefore is a linear process of transition from established to new identities. The disengagement or separation from “old selves” can involve “dissatisfaction, rupture, loss”, and requires a willingness to “try out” possible selves (Ibarra et al., 2010, p. 665). As identity transition is conceptualised as a linear progression, the authors caution that some individuals may “regress”, “recycle”, “backslid[e]”, and “relapse” to previous stages (p. 673). Noticing the dearth of research that addresses the relational context of leadership development, Ibarra and colleagues highlight the role of “guiding figures” (p. 671), such as facilitators, company mentors, and peers, for providing validation, comparison, and guidance.

Gianpiero Petriglieri and Jennifer Petriglieri, colleagues of Ibarra at INSEAD, have also contributed to constructivist research about identity and leadership development (2010). These authors argue that business schools and leadership development programmes are “identity workspaces”, defined as “institutions entrusted to facilitate the process of consolidating existing identities or crafting new ones” (G. Petriglieri, in press, p. 6). The authors draw on concepts from systems psychodynamic literature to describe the contextual features and dynamics which seem necessary for identity work to take place (J. L. Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). In particular, the authors describe how business schools and leadership

development programmes can provide social defences, sentient communities, and rites of passage – three elements of a holding environment or identity workspace which need to be strongly present in order for their inhabitants to undertake identity “transition” or “stabilization” in this setting (J. L. Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 52). Central to this transition process is the “good enough mother” figure usually embodied by the facilitators or trainers, and who provides an “attuned presence” (p. 49), withstands the child’s aggression without retaliation, attends to their needs, and protects them from excessive anxiety or disturbance (for another psychoanalytical perspective on the “good enough mother” role in management training, see Dubouloy, 2004). More recently, these authors describe how participants involved in full-time MBA programmes (and therefore who are not currently employed) develop portable identities within this identity workspace (G. Petriglieri, Petriglieri, & Wood, 2010). Identity work, according to these authors, involves moments of refinement, achievement, discovery, consolidation, and transition.

Some constructivist approaches assume that one of the purposes of leadership development is for the individual to discover their essential, original self. Authentic leadership development is prolific in this assumption (Avolio, 1999, 2010; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). This process of discovering one’s self “is not a process of imitation”; they have to be “originals, not copies”, owning their set of convictions and values (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 397). Once an authentic leader knows their values and convictions, they then need to act in a congruent and consistent manner: “what they say is consistent with what they believe, and their actions are consistent with both their talk and their beliefs” (p. 397). Shamir and Eilam (2005) describe such authentic leaders with words like: “confidently defined”, “internally consistent”, “stable”, “certain”, “coherence”, “prediction”, “control”, “organize” (pp. 398–9).

These “stable and coherent self-concepts” (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 398) that authentic leaders apparently have are necessary to leadership as they act like “the rudder of a ship, bolstering people’s confidence in their ability to navigate through the sometimes murky seas of everyday life” (Swann, 1990, as cited in Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 399). They go on to provide a framework for discovering these self-concepts through the use of life-stories. A stream of literature therefore advises tools and techniques for uncovering and fostering this true, authentic self (London, 2002).

The cause and effect rationality of constructivist identity approaches is typified in Avolio and Gardner’s (2005) description of the benefits of authentic leadership development on followers. The authentic leader’s followers will “internalize values and beliefs espoused by the leader” (p. 327), and these will constitute their perception of their actual and possible selves: “as followers come to know who they are, they in turn will be more transparent with the leader, who in turn will benefit in terms of his or her own development” (p. 327). Identity work here is assumed to be cyclical and dynamic (Day et al., 2009).

In what seems to be an attempt to connect functionalist and constructivist approaches, Day and colleagues (2009) argue that bringing together adult development theory, identity development, moral development, and expertise acquisition will develop “expert leadership” (p. 171) in a more accelerated manner. Identity development here involves stages such as growth, maintenance, integration, and regulation of loss. The authors draw on the identity theory of possible selves, social identity theory, and Lord and Hall’s (2005) previously discussed model, in order to itemise stages of leader identity development. Again we see the assumption that individual differences affect the rate and direction of identity development and leader development. Therefore, time is spent measuring an individual’s developmental

readiness, developmental reserve capacity, and zone of proximal development. The hope is that one's identity becomes well-defined, "fully developed and integrated" (Day et al., 2009, p. 57), as this enables leaders to "build trust through consistent actions" (p. 68). Theories such as this one usually assume leadership is a series of competencies, which can be built through "leader identity formation and change" (Day et al., 2009, p. 185). This competency thinking is challenged by social constructionist research which advocates a practice-based view of leadership instead (Carroll et al., 2008). The authors claim that the role of letting go is central to development, yet they are not quite sure in what way, and therefore call for more research in this area.

The language of constructivist approaches centres on words such as evolution (Guillen & Ibarra, 2008), change (Kempster, 2009), transition (Day & O'Conner, 2003), progress (Van Velsor & Drath, 2004), holding (Murphy & Riggio, 2003), possess (i.e. "now possesses a resource for controlling" in Van Velsor & Drath, 2004, p. 387), consolidation (J. L. Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010), give up (Van Velsor & Drath, 2004), disengage (Guillen & Ibarra, 2008), and disembed (Day & O'Conner, 2003). Common diagrams in this writing are flow charts representing sequential models of development one progresses along (i.e. Van Velsor & Drath, 2004) or multi-stage cycles one loops around (i.e. Kempster, 2009). The way liminality theory is used (i.e. Ibarra et al., 2010) continues to portray identity work as a series of linear stages (from separation to transition to reaggregation). A liminality framing can be useful as it highlights the disruption, uncertainty, and ambiguity of doing identity work in this context; however, recent research questions whether individuals actually experience each of these stages (Beech, 2011). Such research provides a caution to leadership development researchers: leadership development may have some features of liminality, but whether it

contains the major liminal processes should be treated as an empirical question, rather than assumed.

Amongst some constructivist research the presence of words such as give up, disengage, and disembed offer a different set of movements compared with the acquisition focus of functionalist language. With this talk of change, transition, and giving up, it is surprising that the emotional nature has not been built in detail, perhaps reaffirming the privileging of cognition in this literature. However, Ibarra and colleagues' chapter (2010) briefly introduces emotive language such as loss, rupture, and relapse to the experience of identity work, an evocative strand which social constructionist literature develops further.

Social Constructionist Approaches to Leadership Development

A smaller body of leadership development research and practice adopts a social constructionist perspective² (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Cunliffe, 2009; Ford et al., 2008; Ford & Lawler, 2008; Gagnon, 2008; Sinclair, 2009). These approaches challenge the tool box (functionalist) and individual evolution journey (constructivist) approaches (Carroll & Levy, 2010). Rather, such a perspective tends to understand development as “a sequence of ongoing, unfolding opportunities to work with discourses” in different ways (Carroll & Levy, 2010, p. 225). They usually have a sensitivity to the role of discourse (Carroll & Levy, 2010), power (Ford et al., 2008; Gagnon, 2008), relationality (Cunliffe, 2009), critical reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2009), the body, and emotions (Sinclair, 2009). Such approaches do not start with a “deficit model” (Grint, 2007, p. 234) of the leader, nor with a ladder of progression (Day et al., 2009); rather, they tend to view leaders as occupying a complicated discursive position with competing demands which may influence their identity (Ford et al., 2008). They

² Please note that throughout this thesis I move interchangeably between the terms social constructionist and constructionist, with the intention that they both refer to the same concept.

recognise the processual, fragmented, ambiguous, and contradictory nature of everyday life which those involved in leadership and its development continually negotiate (Carroll et al., 2008). Leadership therefore is assumed to be developed “through highways and byways not dreamt of in mainstream theoretical perspectives” (Ford et al., 2008, as cited in Carroll & Levy, 2010, p. 219).

Some social constructionist literature advocates a critically informed approach to leadership development which encourages participants to “challenge taken-for-granted organizational realities” (Cunliffe, 2009, p. 93), which may lead to emancipation from limiting, oppressive, or diminishing assumptions and identities (Carroll & Levy, 2010). Cunliffe (2009) discusses her constructionist approach to teaching leadership to American Executive-MBA students. Her “philosopher leader” course incorporates three interwoven threads: leadership as relational, leadership as a moral activity, and leadership as self- and critical-reflexivity. Critically oriented perspectives are used to shift students’ perceptions of leadership away from heroic and transformational versions to “the notion of leadership as moral responsibility and ethical choices” (p. 91).

As identity constitutes an underlying concept in social constructionist research in general, it follows that the majority of this leadership development research explores differing ways in which identity work occurs, such as identity regulation (Ford et al., 2008; Gagnon, 2008), and identity construction (Carroll & Levy, 2010). A constructionist approach rejects essentialist notions of the self, arguing instead that identity is constantly in flux and becoming as it interacts with various social and linguistic discourses (Thomas & Linstead, 2002). They usually reject leader-focused forms of development, especially those which focus on heroic and transformational leadership. Reflexivity appears as an important aspect of identity work,

and may include notions of morality and ethics. There also seems to be an assumption that workplaces can and should provide “numerous possibilities for the full expression of our humanity” (Ford et al., 2008, p. 171).

Carroll and Levy (2010) claim that the majority of constructionist leadership development focuses on processes of identity regulation (Andersson, 2008; Gagnon, 2008). Such research pays attention to dynamics of power and discursive mechanisms in leadership development programmes which manufacture certain identities, or as Sinclair (2007) says, how participants are “pinned into identities” (p. 139). Gagnon (2008) explores the various forms of insecurity and anxiety which can manifest in leadership development and how these emotions “engender conforming practices” (p. 376). She uses Collinson’s three post-structuralist identities – conformist, dramaturgical, and resistant – to explore how the participants cope with the programme’s attempts to control their “insides” (p. 384). Over 18 months, Gagnon conducted ethnographic studies of two organisations and their in-house management development programmes. Based on observations and interviews with the participants, she traced the discursive practices of identity regulation. Both programmes tightly defined the desired leader identity: for example, one programme encouraged participants to have “edge, energy, decisiveness and speed” (p. 382). Efforts to develop this identity were evident in activities such as forced ranking exercises where participants had 30 minutes to rank their peers from the best to weakest leader. These participants felt compelled to do the programme – failure to participate may result in termination, and failure to perform favourably on the programme also resulted in termination. A culture of competitiveness, panic, careerism, and conformity pervaded both programmes.

Adopting an identity construction lens means that identity work is seen as more “fluid, dynamic, and plural” than a regulation lens allows (Carroll & Levy, 2010, p. 211). Programme participants are seen to hold more agency in their identity work: identities are created and accomplished rather than completely scripted (Sinclair, 2007). Using Beech’s (2008) communicative responses, Carroll and Levy’s (2010) exemplary identity construction research explores three different ways (assimilation, complementarity, rejection) in which identity work was experienced in a leadership development programme, emphasising the “open, alive, playful, and critical and unresolved” nature (p. 226). The authors’ empirical material comes from two emerging leader development programmes, and in particular online interactions from the virtual learning platform which formed a core component of these programmes. Three narratives from three participants were selected based on the different forms of identity work strategies which they exhibited. The first narrative reveals a participant who is feeling “weak, ineffective, and frustrated” (p. 221), and illustrates Beech’s (2008) rejection strategy. The second narrative displays a participant who seems at ease and relaxed with his leadership identity, and which the authors link with Beech’s assimilation strategy. The third narrative captures a participant who does not seem to experience any “diminishment of identity” (p. 224), and therefore reflects a complementarity strategy where he can hold multiple identity options in the one narrative. In showing these various identity strategies, the authors demonstrate how such research can build alternative development practices, ones that “enlarge” rather than reduce “identity options” (p. 218). They argue that identity regulation research that focuses on concepts like anxiety, conformity, regulation, and resistance are less likely to provide such pathways.

Emancipatory forms of leadership development that open up a larger repertoire of identity options for participants usually involve a rejection of heroic and transformation versions of

leadership. Providing “alternative languages that allow for different possibilities of being” (Ford et al., 2008, p. 172) is positioned as a crucial aspect of such emancipatory programmes. Programmes should eliminate the unachievable “super-hero” model of leadership and instead offer identity possibilities for leaders who are “often emotional, are riven with desire, find the limitations on the emotions they can express oppressive, experience huge anxieties and uncertainties (Ford, 2007) and are, in a nutshell, human beings with all that that involves” (Ford et al., 2008, p. 174). Cunliffe (2009) offers an alternative identity for leadership, the philosopher leader. In this proposition, Cunliffe is shifting attention “away from heroic, transactional and transformational versions of leadership . . . to the notion of leadership as moral responsibility and ethical choices” (p. 91), which is enacted through self- and critical-reflexivity.

The tone and style of constructionist writing can also challenge academic traditions. Amanda Sinclair’s (2009) first-person writing is worthy of note here. In this article, Sinclair lifts the “veil” on leadership development as “objective knowledge-building and information transfer” to reveal the “rich emotional, political and psychodynamic relations” (p. 271) which swirl about in this context. Her aim is to expose the processes of seduction in leadership development with an attention to gender, power, and the body. Sinclair uses concepts and language foreign to functionalist and constructivist identity research, such as “seduce”, “desire”, “surrender”, “beguile”, “entrance”.

While Cunliffe bases her work on the assumption that “if we know who to be, then what to do falls into place” (2009, p. 94), it would be simplistic to assume social constructionist research stops at this level. Across this literature, an assumption is that if leaders can make their own identity work conscious, “they are not only in a better position to take up or resist

identities from themselves, but also to make choices about whether and how they impose identities on others” (Sinclair, 2007, p. 142). This suggests that leadership development has the potential to alter the workplace by discouraging leaders’ attempts to control and regulate their subordinates and peers.

There is a distinct difference in the feel of the language used by social constructionist development research. This leadership development offers the participants the possibility to experience emancipation, resistance, struggle, tension, anxiety, subversion, and withdrawal (Carroll & Levy, 2010, p. 218). Development may be “open, alive, playful” (Carroll & Levy, 2010, p. 226) and involve creativity and experimentation. Aspects of development may remain indeterminate or “unresolved” for some participants (Carroll & Levy, 2010, p. 226). This language offers a different flow and feel of the development process: rather than images of development as adding to a tool box (functionalist), steps or cycles (constructivist), constructionist writing conjures images of overlapping, asymmetrical spider webs, and the peaks and troughs of a rollercoaster ride.

Undoing Leadership Development: Assumptions, Questions, and Pathways

If we look at the language used by functionalist and constructivist leadership development writers, a particular picture has been created regarding what development means. The two dominant approaches, functionalist and constructivist, use language such as acquire, build, and gain (functionalist), and evolution, change, and disembed (constructivist). Both approaches are captured in the following quote from Brungardt (1997), where leadership development refers to “almost every form of *growth* or *stage* of development in the life cycle that *promotes, encourages, and assists* [emphasis added] in one’s leadership potential” (p. 83). It apparently spans a lifetime in which “knowledge and experience *builds* and allows for

even more *advanced* learning and *growth* [emphasis added]" (p. 83), where that learning journeys along an "ordered *hierarchical sequence* of increasing complexity [emphasis added]" (Roberts, 1981, as cited in Brungardt, 1997, p. 83).

Development, according to this language, is not so different from its dictionary definition where development means "growth; progress; change" and "a progression from a simpler or lower to a more advanced, mature, or complex form or stage" ("Random House Dictionary," 2010). The majority of current leadership practice (that assumes linear stages of progressive growth) reflects this definition. Given that the "self-improvement" industry is named with this continuously improving assumption, it is no wonder therefore that individuals also search for continuous self-improvement (Webb, 2006).

However, the word "develop" is far more complex than this interpretation. The etymology of the word "develop" is from a 1650s word "desveloper" meaning "unroll, unfold". "Des-" means "undo" and "-veloper" means "wrap up". This "unfold" meaning is not antiquated – it is given as a synonym for development in the 2010 *Random House Dictionary*. Therefore, despite popular usage focusing on evolve, progress, and growth connotations of development, the term has etymological roots in "undoing" – the central topic of this thesis. Whilst the research and practice focusing on the acquisition, expansion, and building of leadership capacity is valuable, I suggest that the "unrolling" and "unfolding" aspect of development needs to be investigated to offer a more complete theorisation of the leadership development process and experience.

Across all three approaches, the identities of participants seem to be a primary target for development efforts in order to provoke deep change in leadership practices and capacities: identity is used to gain maximum effectiveness from leadership development efforts (Day &

Harrison, 2007; McCollum, 1999; Pearce, 2007). Identity therefore is seen as a “frontier” in need of “taming” (Day & Harrison, 2007, p. 370). It is described as having the potential to bridge the bemoaned leader development versus leadership development divide (Day & Harrison, 2007). This brings us to Miller and Rose (2008) who argue that the most potent way of acting upon people is to transform their personhood. If the goal of leadership development is to “build explicit links between individual self-concepts and organizational identity and image” (Day & Harrison, 2007, p. 369), identity is being used to bind the leader into the productive life of organisations and society (Rose, 1999). Faced with increasing pressure to show evidence of benefits and long-term change, leadership development may have turned to identity in the hope that it has the power to achieve this purpose. It also has mass rollout appeal, or as McCollum (1999) says, through focusing attention on “developing the leader at the deepest level of the individual . . . we may be able to make everyone a leader” (p. 153).

Lord and Hall (2005) believe that in order “to sustain interest for the months and years required to develop and practice complex leadership skills, it is also likely that the leadership role needs to become part of one’s self-identity” (p. 592). In a leadership development programme built on the work of Warren Bennis and with links to Harvard Business School, the programme literature says that “the intention of this course is to leave the participants actually being leaders and exercising leadership effectively as their natural self-expression” (Erhard, Jensen, Zaffron, & Granger, 2010, p. 2) Assuming that this leadership identity permeates “one’s perceptions, emotions, creative imagination, thinking, planning, and action” (Erhard et al., 2010, p. 1), leadership becomes the only identity one can and should use in “any situation” (Erhard et al., 2010, p. 13). Such colonisation (Habermas, 1984) of how one should think, act, and feel warrants further critical inquiry. Ford and colleagues (2008) argue

that instead of colonising the lifeworld, ideally leadership development programmes should emancipate leaders from limiting heroic and masculine identities, offering instead a greater (but not limitless) array. Identity research may benefit from looking at claims of both colonisation and emancipation: the destruction associated with colonising an identity, and the unfastening of participants from constraining leadership identities. Due to the range of meanings contained in the word undoing, it holds the potential to explore this variation.

There appears to be a series of silences and problematic assumptions across the various identity and leadership development literature. The functionalist and constructivist identity literature seems to assume that individuals have unfettered agency in their identity work (Ibarra et al., 2010; Van Velsor & Drath, 2004). This literature does not seem to consider the material, symbolic, or discursive structures that can thwart the construction of identities. In addition, there seems to be a silence surrounding the role of facilitators in identity work – both in their own and the participants'. Constructionist identity research tends to look at either construction (Carroll & Levy, 2010) or regulation (Gagnon, 2008), although Carroll and Levy (2010) capture different ways that identity work can be worked with through communicative responses. The field could be well served by continuing to investigate the various and conflicting ways that identity work – and calls to do identity work – can be worked with, a proposition which this thesis will address.

This chapter has reviewed the wealth of leadership development literature by categorising it into three main orientations: functionalist, constructivist, and constructionist. I have covered leadership development writing in general, as well as writing which looks at identity. In doing so, I suggest that the majority of literature focuses on the “wrap up” definition of development, describing the various tools one should add to their skill set, or itemising the

stages one should progress along. While this is valuable research, such a focus means that the other definition of development, to unroll or undo, has not been developed as strongly. Whilst there is some writing which plays on the edges of this definition: the process of disembedding (Ibarra et al., 2010), letting go (Day et al., 2009), and the enlarging of identity options in programmes (Carroll & Levy, 2010), such voices need to be amplified. I position the idea of “undoing” as one way of drawing these experiences (as well as others) together. As identity forms a key foundation to this thesis, the next chapter turns to the identity studies literature. I focus primarily on constructionist approaches to identity, and analyse the language of this research in a similar way to this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Contemporary Approaches to Identity Scholarship

Robyn Thomas (2009) contends that identity research has “reached a level not previously known in critical management studies” (p. 166). This identity-turn evidenced in organisation studies over the last 20 years has seen a range of phenomena explored through this lens, including leadership and its development (Carroll & Levy, 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006). While some cite identity as the latest academic fashion or fad, there are those who argue that it is a useful construct for helping people “grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves at minute points of the intersection of biography and history within society” (Mills, 1970, as cited in Watson, 2008, p. 140). As there are a number of scholars investigating identity, the study of identity is about as contested and fragmented as identity itself: several different approaches to understanding identity are available, each offering a varying interpretation of the relationship between the individual, other people, events, and society. Due to the diversity of perspectives, it is necessary for me to demarcate the particular interpretation this thesis focuses on, social constructionism. After outlining the assumptions of this approach, I analyse the ways in which identity has been framed by constructionist writers in the organisation studies field. In doing so, I offer a new way in which we can understand identity work in leadership development: the concept of undoing.

A Constructionist Understanding of Identity

From social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), dramaturgical approaches (Goffman, 1969), to psychoanalytical approaches (E. H. Erikson, 1968), identity is a multi-disciplinary field influenced by philosophy, psychology, and

sociology, to name a few. The proliferation of identity in organisation studies has been mapped by a number of useful overviews, including Alvesson (2010), Alvesson et al., (2008), Casey (1995), du Gay, Evans, & Redman (2000), and Thomas (2009).

I wish to focus on a particular stream of organisational scholars who use a social constructionist lens influenced by a post-structuralist, relational and discursive perspective of identity that holds a sensitivity to the social and historical context – some more so than others (scholars such as Mats Alvesson, Stefan Sveningsson, Brigid Carroll, Robyn Thomas, David Collinson, and Tony Watson, to name a few). The organisation studies scholars I refer to above have built their work on the shoulders of several key theorists, such as Mead, Goffman, Foucault, and Gergen. These writers have all significantly influenced, albeit in different ways, what we know as constructionist identity perspectives today (Cerulo, 1997). In the following sections I will refer to the contributions of these theorists.

During the time I have been doing my doctorate, social constructionist approaches have arguably been one of the “hottest” streams of identity research in organisation studies literature, which makes it a contemporary and contestable field of focus. I also chose this type of identity research as it strongly informs the Atlas Institute’s approach to identity.³ Amidst the dominance of functionalist and constructivist approaches to leadership development, it is important to emphasise that using a social constructionist philosophy is not typical for most leadership development providers. It is also important to acknowledge the various shades of constructionism; therefore, I do not claim to offer the one true version – rather, I am producing a certain kind of constructionism which reflects my interpretation of the literature.

³ I provide a fuller description of the Atlas Institute’s approach to identity on page 108.

A social constructionist treatment of identity “rejects any category that sets forward essential or core features as the unique property of a collective’s members” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 387). Rather, such research often explores how identities are “molded, refabricated, and mobilized in accord with reigning cultural scripts and centers of power” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 387). The family, education system, popular culture, workplaces, and for this thesis, leadership development programmes, are examples of these “centers of power”. A social constructionist definition of identity describes it as “the (conscious) struggle to respond to the question, ‘who am I?’ [or who do I want to become?] and is of a somewhat more linguistic and social nature” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1168). Such a definition highlights how identity is an ongoing, temporal search that can be fraught with contradictions, anxiety, and tension, and is negotiated through language/discourse, social relations, and context. It also involves defining one’s self in opposition to who/what we are not or do not want to become, otherwise known as anti-identity (Carroll & Levy, 2008; Musson & Duberely, 2006; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006).

Identity work is the mental, emotional, and embodied activity that a person engages in when prompted by these questions, usually incited by social interaction (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 15). It involves a process of “continuous forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626). This identity work is said to be undertaken in order to construct an “understanding of self that is coherent, distinct, and positively valued” (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 15). Like Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), I am interested in the “open, situational and discursive” (p. 1168) nature of human identity rather than “depth-psychological issues contingent upon early identifications” (p. 1168).

Therefore, as I am using a social constructionist approach I will not explore in any depth the psychological or psychoanalytical perspectives on identity.

One way of further delineating a constructionist perspective of identity is to position it in regards to three key tensions which divide the identity field more broadly: agency vs. structure; individual vs. selves-in-relation; and the tension between singular/fixed vs. multiple/fluid nature of identity. In a recent overview of the identity studies field, Alvesson (2010) uses two of these tensions (agency and multiplicity) to organise the variety of research. I adopt this framework and add the relationality tension.

Agency vs. structure

The amount of agency a person has is one of the core debates in identity studies that even constructionist writers do not agree upon (Alvesson, 2010; Thomas, 2009). Agency here refers to the extent to which an individual is “active and/or acted upon in the crafting of the self” (Thomas, 2009, p. 169). It is commonly referred to as the agency/structure dualism, or other derivatives such as fragile/autonomous, object/subject, or voluntarism/determinism. In constructionist research, language, or more precisely discourse, is seen as a primary force or resource for identity work. Different writers hold different beliefs regarding how muscular discourse is: on the one hand, socio-psychological approaches portray an individual who has “unimpeded access to the realisation of their self-actualisation” (Thomas, 2009, p. 169), whereas Foucauldian approaches portray an “utterly passive” (p. 171) and fragile individual who is determined by discourse. This agency/structure distinction can be expressed as a tension between subject- and object-orientated identity research (Carroll & Levy, 2010). Object-orientated research, such as identity regulation, usually portrays an object who is acted upon, or as Newton (1998) says, “done to” rather than “doing” (p. 428). Such research

explores how factors outside the individual, such as structures, discourses, or elites, have the power to orchestrate one's identity (or more accurately, subjectivity) (Alvesson, 2010). Subject-orientated research, on the other hand, usually affords the individual more agency in their identity decisions and actions.

While it could be easy to become caught in the dualism, Bergstrom and Knights (2006) reject these binaries and instead argue that identity is "the effect of the interaction between human agency and organizational discourses rather than a determinant of one or the other" (p. 352). That is, an individual's subjectivity is "neither wholly determined by organizational discourses nor simply a product of human agency" (p. 370). Collinson (2003) agrees as he argues that the self is both a subject and an object: subject in the sense that it is an active agent, and an object as an individual can reflect on themselves, and on the way others see them, and incorporate these interpretations.

This thesis adopts the position that identities are constructed within discursive contexts, but that individuals are able to influence and shape these contexts (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Carroll & Levy, 2008; Down & Reveley, 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Thomas & Linstead, 2002). That is, rather than adopting a post-structuralist perspective in which the actor is fragile and passive with respect to the "muscular" power of discourse (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1178), I favour an approach which places some agency in the social actors, and recognises their "choice and intentionality in making up the self" (Thomas, 2009, p. 169). However, I agree with Carroll and Levy (2010) who say that "while agents do have choice, their choice is constrained by pre-existing identity offerings shaped by managerial ideologies" (p. 215). These ideologies constrain the individual as they offer certain ways of talking, knowing, and being; however, discourses can never fully constrain as they are always

indeterminate and can be shifted, moved, and altered (Thomas, 2009). So, for example, leadership development participants may utilise and reproduce discourses from the programme in their talk about identity, and at times alter and even resist this discourse in new and unpredictable ways, as well as attempting to introduce and create alternative discourses, rather than being passively determined by them.

I adopt the approach taken by Alvesson and Willmott (2002) who say that employees (in my case, participants) are not passive, nor are managers (or facilitators) omnipotent. Indeed, individuals may “actively participate in the production of the self-same subjectivity that constrains them” (Bergstrom & Knights, 2006, p. 352). However, it is unrealistic to expect that all individuals will engage in the call to do identity work, and more specifically, to be undone or undo others, as individuals vary in how active or passive they are in doing identity work (Watson, 2008).

Individual vs. selves-in-relation

The individual vs. selves-in-relation debate considers the extent to which identity construction is influenced (or not) through relationships with other people. An individual orientation would view the person as a closed-off entity, who through private self-reflection attempts to uncover their inner voice, and original, authentic self (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1994). A constructionist perspective would err more on the side of the selves-in-relation argument, which believes that people address the questions “Who am I?” and “how should I be?” not in isolation but in relation to other actors and situations (Carroll & Levy, 2008). The self, as Townley (1995) puts simply, “is a relational concept” (p. 283). These other objects define the subject, as the subject also defines them. This relational lens does not necessarily deny agency on the part of the subject; rather, identity is both “self-determined and socially

constructed” (Townley, 1995, p. 283). For Goffman (1969), the capacity to be aware of another’s interpretations of oneself is central to dramaturgical identity. The self therefore is interdependent with others, yet to a certain extent is separate from them – a dynamic which Collinson (2003) believes is a key source of ambiguity for the individual. This relational conceptualisation of identity cultivates an understanding of the self as “a porous part of the whole” (Sinclair, 2007, p. 143), alluding to the potential in this identity research to move between micro and macro analytical levels.

Down and Reveley (2009) argue that managers in particular use interaction-based identity work to resource and confirm their self-narrations. Encounters with others, though often a source of anxiety, can provide answers about who they are (and who they are not) that are not entirely fulfilled by organisational or cultural discourses. Therefore, Down and Reveley (2009) argue that:

Most management identity researchers forget or ignore one of the most fundamental micro-sociological axioms: that confirming one’s identity by displaying oneself in front of others is central to identity formation. Reaching its pinnacle in Goffman’s work, this insight must be brought back to centre stage within management identity theory (p. 398).

This idea of “displaying oneself in front of others” can provide face-to-face confirmations of identity: if successful self-presentation occurs, the individual can experience “self-verification” – a feeling which Down and Reveley argue is given “heightened significance” as the current social and organisation conditions mean that many managers have “inherently unstable narrative identities” (2009, p. 380).

Nic Beech (2008) picks up on this individual/relational debate through another binary – internal/external – as he aims to explore how identity constructions gain meaning through dialogue. He places it in the framing of dialogic identity construction, incorporating

Bakhtin's "utterances" and Wittgenstein's notion of a language game. According to Bakhtin, the basic units of language, "utterances", are always in relationship with other utterances, inviting, shaping, or responding to other utterances (Beech, 2008). The utterances of others are initially foreign words but given time and usage they can become assimilated into the self and therefore part of one's meaning. Following Bakhtin, meaningfulness is achieved by fitting language into an internal context. Dialogues which "impact on identity form 'deep traces' (Wertsch, 1991) which are left in the inner dialogue of a person" (Beech, 2008, p. 55).

This thesis agrees that identities are forged in relation to others, especially in leadership development. As Scott (2010, p. 213) reminds us in her theory of the reinventive institution, the authorship of the self is a result of the interaction between subjects and experts in these settings, not the "unique privilege" of one or the other. Such settings can require individuals to confess and disclose identity-related stories or utterances, and to display oneself in a collective environment. The inclusion of explicit peer and group feedback mechanisms means that individuals are presented with others' interpretations of their identity, which Goffman suggests influence one's identity.

Singular and fixed vs. multiple and fluid

The third debate centres on the tension between whether identity is single/fixed or multiple/fluid. The claim that identity is in flux, multiple, fractured, social, and constituted through discourse has become "a hegemonic discourse" to rival the one it arose to critique – the fixed, unified, and essential self (Thomas, 2009, p. 180). Given the fashionable turns to post-modernism and post-structuralism, much of the social constructionist identity writing seems committed to portraying identity in this amorphous manner (i.e. Collinson, 2003; Fairhurst, 2007; Kunda, 2006; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Both

the Atlas Institute and the constructionist literature I focus on promote this concept of identity, therefore I will explore this tension in more detail.

The idea that a person has a set of selves has a long history (Elster, 1986). The various theories, ranging from philosophy, psychology, economics, sociology, and nowadays organisation studies, can be differentiated based on how literally they take this idea of several selves. In his book *The Saturated Self*, Gergen (1991) describes the move from romanticism to modernism and finally post-modernism. With this movement, the belief of attaining an essential fixed self has been eroded, and in its place the idea that we do not have an immutable essence or unified self has arisen. He argues that through technologies of social saturation, we have become increasingly intertwined with our social surroundings which leads to a “populating of the self” by partial identities (p. 49). We end up in a “multiphrenic” state, in which we experience the “vertigo of unlimited multiplicity” (p. 49). Ford and colleagues (2008) describe this notion of a multiple and fluid identity as one in which “who we are is always an open question, with the answer changing from moment to moment, according to the positions made available in any moment” (p. 80).

Perhaps one of the earliest sustained theorisations of the multiple self is delivered by George Herbert Mead. In his book *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), Mead describes the “multiple personality” (p. 142) that manifests in the following behaviour:

We carry on a whole series of different relationships to different people. We are one thing to one man and another thing to another. There are parts of the self which exist only for the self in relationship to itself. We divide ourselves up into all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances. We discuss politics with one and religion with another. There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions (p. 142).

This quote exemplifies the selves-in-relation assumption previously discussed, as we “divide ourselves up” based on who we are in relationships with others. Mead (1934) describes how each person is a “parliament of selves”, in which people can have different selves – which self is shown depends on the social relations. Gergen (1991) extends this idea of divided selves through the metaphor of the self-as-chorus:

Increasingly we emerge as the possessors of many voices. Each self contains a multiplicity of others, singing different melodies, different verses, and with different rhythms. Nor do these many voices necessarily harmonize. At times they join together, at times they fail to listen one to another, and at times they create a jarring discord (p. 83).

The experience therefore of possessing “many voices” can bring moments of both beautiful harmony and synthesis, where the different selves blend to create some congruent meaning, and at other times clash against each other in chaotic disjuncture.

In her study of a Japanese business, Kondo (1990) challenges Western assumptions about the “boundedness and fixity of personal identity” (p. 26). She describes the constantly shifting and contextual “plethora of available I’s” (p. 29) her research participants negotiate which are shaped by kinship, occupation, gender, formality, and other people’s desires. She emphasises the “deeply felt, subtly nuanced, often contradictory emotions” (p. 257) felt by those with multiple selves, and alerts researchers to the fragility of these identities. Kondo encourages Western researchers to consider how “selves *in the plural*” (p. 43, author’s emphasis) are constructed in a given context, with a sensitivity to dynamics of power and gender. She also draws attention to identity as a “mobile site of contradiction and disunity” as identity is a “node where various discourses temporarily intersect in particular ways” (p. 47).

Tracy and Trethewey (2005) offer a seminal contribution to the theory of the multiple self. The authors propose the metaphor of a crystallised self (as opposed to a fixed, planar self) as

it offers a more nuanced, multi-dimensional, and complex vision of how to understand who I am. They argue for different shapes of crystals that are constructed and constrained by different discourses. As a crystal has many facets, so too would a person, and the authors argue that a person would be able to bring these facets into different areas of their life – for example, an executive may choose not to bring their nurturer facet into work, and not bring their efficient “Tayloristic” facet into their home. Overall they argue that:

By conceiving of identities as ongoing, emergent, and not entirely predictable crystals, people are forced to acknowledge a range of possible selves embodied in a range of contexts – even as they are constrained by discourses of power. The crystallized self suggests that there are always new facets that are themselves neither real nor fake, but are materially and symbolically relevant and ready to be polished, cleaved, or transformed (p. 189).

In order to develop this crystallised self, Tracy and Trethewey (2005) suggest people inch “closer to the edges in their lives” (p. 188). One way to do this is to place themselves in situations which mean they are uncomfortable and non-expert as this will offer them a fuller repertoire of “narratives/activities/resources to draw upon to construct a self that is richer than the subject positions offered up by contemporary organizational discourse” (p. 188), or as they say, to develop a “life wrapped in a quilt of many colours rather than one suffocated by a monochromatic blanket” (p. 188). These uncomfortable and different situations will initiate contemplation and reflection which will “encourage the continued (re)growth of a crystallized self” (p. 188). This will require the person to “traverse, intersect, and hold in tension competing discourses and attendant ways of being” as they cannot freely choose the discourses which constitute them (p. 188). Leadership development programmes seem to fulfil this description as they are places where participants can feel non-expert and therefore uncomfortable, are encouraged to self-reflect, and according to Carroll and Levy (2010) are confronted with a range of competing discourses of identity.

Although operating with arguably a more constructivist perspective, Ibarra (1999) justifies the benefit of functioning with a repertoire of selves. Her study focuses on junior professionals who are undergoing a change from technical to managerial work, and how these workers transition to new roles by experimenting with “provisional selves”. They build a “repertoire of possible selves” to help with this transition (p. 772). She identifies three main steps to this process: 1) observing role models in order to identify potential desirable identities; 2) experimenting with “trying on” these provisional selves, and 3) evaluating these identity experiments based on internal standards and external feedback. Ibarra argues that junior professionals who develop diverse repertoires of possible selves “added greater diversity to their repertory of attitudes, behaviours, and self-presentation styles” which means they have a stronger ability to try out “innovative responses” (p. 784).

Drawing on the work of Knights and Willmott, Collinson (2003) argues that clinging to the “illusory goal” of having a single, stable self is potentially more risky, counterproductive, and can foster greater insecurity than negotiating multiple identities as identity can never be “fully secured or rendered stable” (p. 533). Carroll and Levy (2010) argue that there is greater “space for action” (p. 224) for those involved in leadership (and its development) if individuals develop a more agile and fluid perception of identity. Such a perspective enables leaders to “maintain alternative narratives” (p. 212), mobilise different communicative responses, and potentially develop a more expansive leadership repertoire, making them more adept at negotiating the complexity of doing leadership. Gergen makes the case for “merit in multiplicity” (1991, p. 153), as it invites a “heteroglossia of being, a living out of the multiplicity of voices within the sphere of human possibility” (p. 247). We become like the Greek sea god Proteus, who could change his shape, enabling us to have a “continuous flow

of being” (p. 249), where we can experiment with different possibilities of who to be, how to collaborate, and what solutions to offer.

This thesis generally agrees with the idea that selves are “in the plural” (Kondo, 1990, p. 43). I particularly enjoy Mead’s idea that we have different selves for some relationships, and Gergen’s belief that we possess many voices. I can see how such an identity can potentially enable a way of being that is more technicolour than “monochromatic” (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005, p. 188). However, I am doubtful of what seem to be quite radical claims that who we are is “always an open question, with the answer changing from moment to moment” (Ford et al., 2008, p. 80). In addition, I am cautious that this multiplicity discourse seems to have become a privileged ideal, and as such is largely underchallenged (for an exception see Newton, 1998). Therefore, it holds Alvesson’s (2008) key criteria for a topic worthy of critical attention as it is an ideology about identity that is dominant, underchallenged, and potentially harmful. I will return to this claim at the end of this chapter.

Analysing the Language of Identity Scholarship

Having outlined the main assumptions common to most constructionist interpretations of identity, I will now analyse the language used of seminal organisation studies works to expose the particular ways in which identity is framed. Keeping in line with my previous sections, I focus primarily on constructionist research. In doing so, I establish how the concept of “undoing” offers a unique contribution to the field.

The process of forming a sense of self has been described using several key labels which evoke images of organisation such as identity **project**, identity **management**, identity **achievement**, identity **manufacture**, identity **construction**, and identity **work** (Watson, 2008). These last two terms have become particularly popular and enduring constructs. In one

of the first, and certainly one of the most cited, publications about identity work in an organisational context, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) define identity work with verbs such as “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising” (p. 626). This definition, and the language it uses, is used by many researchers as a foundation for understanding identity work – indeed this thesis uses it – and therefore we see many of these verbs reproduced in identity research. Table 1 below presents 10 ways in which identity research can be grouped and in doing so the dominance of construction, acquisition, maintenance, and regulation can be seen. I acknowledge that this is by no means an exhaustive overview, and other framings may not be included. For example, Alvesson (2010) provides an alternative set of metaphors that are not all explicitly covered here (surfer, struggler, storyteller, self-doubter, strategist, soldier, and stencil).

Table 1.

Overview of Dominant Conceptualisations of Identity Work Based on Selected Organisation Studies Literature

Identity work as construction	Identity work as acquisition	Identity work as maintenance	Identity work as regulation	Identity work as violence
forming (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002)	add to and discard elements from their repertoires (Ibarra, 1999, p. 782)	maintaining (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002)	suture people to social structures (Kuhn, 2006)	flattened (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005)
self-formation (Townley, 1995)	trying on (Ibarra, 1999)	managing (Watson, 2008)	constrained (Kuhn, 2006)	suffocated (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005)
creation (Pullen, 2006)	assembled (Ibarra, 1999)	working at (Watson, 2008)	determined (Kuhn, 2006)	colonised (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005)
production (Deetz, 1995)	fashioned (Ibarra, 1999)	embraced (Watson, 2008)	manufactured (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001)	cleaved (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005)
craft (Kondo, 1990)	transfer (Ibarra, 1999)	securing (Collinson, 2003)	control (Alvesson, 2001)	assimilation (Beech, 2008)
incorporate (Watson, 2008)	combining (Ibarra, 1999)	sustain (Collinson, 2003)	moulding (Alvesson, 2001)	threatened (Alvesson et al., 2008)
take on (Watson, 2008)	expand and refine (Ibarra, 1999)	apprehending (Ybema et al., 2009)	disciplining (Alvesson, 2001)	self-destruction (Deetz, 1992)
absorb (Watson, 2008)	gain (Sturdy et al., 2006)	preservation (Jackson, 1996)	surveillance (Alvesson, 2001)	resisted (Ybema et al., 2009)
shape (Ybema et al., 2009)	acquire (Sturdy et al., 2006)	stabilising (Alvesson, 2001)	conforming (Gagnon, 2008)	repairing (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002)

bolstered (Alvesson et al., 2008)	modify (Ibarra, 1999)	protecting (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010)	“pinned into identities” (Sinclair, 2007)	exploded (Jackson, 1996)
becoming (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003)	incorporate (Pullen & Linstead, 2005)	holding (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010)	imprints (Alvesson, 2010)	struggle (Carroll & Levy, 2010)
weaving (Carroll & Levy, 2010)	selecting (Ibarra, 1999)	consolidation (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010)		dominate (Carroll & Levy, 2010)
authoring (Carroll & Levy, 2010)				uphill battle; fighting (Alvesson, 2010)
knitting elements together (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001)				broken open (Ford et al., 2008)
Identity work as transformation	Identity work as discarding	Identity work as play	Identity work as performance	Identity work as seduction
transformation (Sturdy et al, 2006)	discard (Ibarra, 1999)	play (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010)	performance (Down & Reveley, 2009)	seduce (Sinclair, 2009; Ford et al., 2008)
overhauled (Alvesson et al, 2008)	reject (Beech, 2008)	discovery (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010)	presentation (Down & Reveley, 2009)	lure (Carroll & Levy, 2010)
reinventing (Jackson, 1996)	revert (Carroll & Levy, 2008)	fantasy (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006)	narration (Down & Reveley, 2009)	
re-engineering (Jackson, 1996)	defaulting (Carroll & Levy, 2008)	experimentation (Carroll & Levy, 2010)	choreographers (Collinson, 2006)	

gradual change (Alvesson, 2001)

“let go and open up” (Alvesson, 2010, p. 202)

creative (Down & Reveley, 2009)

manipulators (Collinson, 2006)

transition (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010)

trial (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010)

mimicry (Ibarra, 1999)

try out (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010)

display (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010)

flirtatious (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010)

dramaturgy (Collinson, 2003; Gagnon, 2008)

The first verb Alvesson and Willmott use, “forming”, features strongly in the literature, and as such I have grouped it under the term identity construction/formation. Terms such as self-formation (Townley, 1995), creation (Pullen, 2006), and production (Deetz, 1994) are frequently used. This is perhaps no surprise given the common usage of the term “identity construction” which seems to have become a pillar of the research. The definition of construct is to build or form by putting together parts (“Random House Dictionary,” 2010), and if we look at similar language used across the literature, it becomes clear that this cumulative and additive conceptualisation of identity work is popular. The following verbs are used: craft (Kondo, 1990), incorporate, take on, absorb (Watson, 2008), shape (Ybema et al., 2009), bolstered (Alvesson et al., 2008), weaving (Carroll & Levy, 2010), and knitting (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001). This language conjures images of identity work as piecing together fragments of a puzzle with the result of creating a solid and robust form. The individual seems to be agentic: able to make choices and use their discretion. The identity work here seems to be around integrating (“weaving”) the various elements in ways that strengthens (“bolster”) the beams or planks which make up one’s identity. As explained previously, Carroll & Levy’s (2010) research is an example of this perspective applied to leadership development.

Similar to the language of construction, identity work as acquisition is another main theme in the literature. When describing how individuals create and experiment with possible selves, Ibarra (1999) uses language such as add to, trying on, assembled, selecting, acquiring, combining, modify, and expand and refine. These words construct a picture of this type of identity work as adding to, increasing, accumulating, or changing the repertoire of selves one has in their “parliament”. Identity change therefore occurs through enlarging the number of voices in one’s chorus (Gergen, 1991). To acquire something also carries a definition of possession (“Random House Dictionary,” 2010); therefore, there is a connotation in this

literature that identity work is a pursuit to acquire elements one can possess. These elements seem to be initially external to the person, but become internalised.

Maintaining, a verb used in Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) definition, represents another theme of how identity work is conceptualised. This idea of sustaining or keeping one's identity static is captured in similar verbs such as managing, embraced (Watson, 2008), securing, sustain (Collinson, 2003), preservation (Jackson, 1996), protecting, and holding on (J. L. Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). Again we hear resonances of possession, and securing or protecting these possessions of identity. This language suggests a plateau stage in identity work, where one regroups, takes stock, and pauses amidst moments of acquisition and construction. Perhaps this stabilisation is a necessary reprieve from the anxiety of the post-modern condition: it is as close as one gets to having a stable and fixed identity. It does raise the question, protection from what?

The regulation of identity work is a clearly identifiable field of scholarship, and contains a recognisable vocabulary such as discipline, mould, control (Alvesson, 2001), conform (Collinson, 2006), constrain (Kuhn, 2006), and manufacture (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001). Kuhn (2006) evocatively uses the word "suture" (p. 1340) to describe how people become tied to social structures, roles, and discourses, and Sinclair (2007) expresses how people are "pinned into identities" (p. 139). This discourse reflects the agency/structure debate and the portrayal of a depowered individual whose identity is controlled by discursive, material, and/or symbolic forces. The individual may internalise regimes of power and control and therefore monitor both their own and others' behaviour (Foucault, 1977). However, such research may also look for moments of resistance (Thomas, 2009). As explained previously, Gagnon's (2008) article is an example of work done from this perspective in managerial leadership development programmes.

Leading on from regulation, an intriguing strand of words invokes images of violence. Tracy and Trethewey (2005) describe the idea of a singular and fixed identity as “flattened”, “suffocated”, and “colonized” and suggest that aspects of one’s identity can be “cleaved”. Beech (2008) talks about “assimilation”, Alvesson and colleagues (2008) of how identities can be “threatened”, Deetz (1992) mentions “self-destruction”, Carroll and Levy (2010) describe the “struggle” involved, and Ybema and colleagues (2009) mention how identities can be resisted. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) talk about “repairing” and Alvesson and colleagues mention “overhaul[ing]” which may be necessary after identities have “exploded” (Jackson, 1996). This sharp imagery is particularly interesting as it offers a different way of understanding identity work to the forming or constructing language. It captures the attempts of others to constrain (“suffocate”) and dominate (“assimilate”) one’s identity. Perhaps this is what individuals wish to protect themselves from? Or it could be the point from which individuals need to reconstruct their identity. The identity work here may be around fighting against this violence, as well as the repair work that goes on afterwards. While the sharpness of the terminology is its appeal, it is also a limitation as it does not offer more subtle or nuanced ways of working with it, and may end up fixing individuals into limiting victim/perpetrator roles.

There are other images of identity work which are cited less frequently in the literature. A few writers talk of the “transformation” of one’s identity (Sturdy, Brocklehurst, Winstanley, & Littlejohns, 2006) or of how selves can be “reinvented” or “re-engineered” (Jackson, 1996). A recently introduced set of words describe identity work as a playful and creative process (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). If we interpret play in a dramaturgical sense, it leads us to line of literature which describes identity work as “performance” (Down & Reveley, 2009). This involves choreography (Collinson, 2006), rehearsal (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010), mimicry (Ibarra, 1999), and narration (Down & Reveley, 2009). Finally, an even smaller

trail of language hints at the seductive and alluring aspects of identity work (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Ford et al., 2008; Sinclair, 2009).

The concept of getting rid of an identity, or aspects of one's identity, is infrequently discussed; however, when it is, verbs such as "discard" (Ibarra, 1999), "let go and open up" (Alvesson, 2010, p. 202), or "reject" (Beech, 2008) are used. Although Ibarra talks about "discarding" new possible selves one has tried on, she does not talk about the loss or letting go of the individual's current identity. I have also grouped the terms relating to reversion or defaulting here, which allude to moments of regression in the pursuit of identity change.

The prefix "re-" is used prevalently when talking about identity work: redefining (Watson, 2008), reproducing (Sturdy et al., 2006), recasting (Musson & Duberley, 2006), and reauthor (Ybema et al., 2009). Given the prevalence of the term construction, its cousin reconstruction is often called upon (Ybema et al., 2009). Often, the two work in tandem: "construction and reconstruction" (Pullen, 2006, p. 4). There is a tendency amongst writers to use these tandem phrases: "creation and recreation" (Pullen, 2006; "formulated or reformulated" (Ybema et al., 2009); "constituted and reconstituted" (Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Ybema et al., 2009); and "production and reproduction" (Deetz, 1994). The prefix "re-" means to go "back to the original place again" ("Online Etymology Dictionary," 2010), although I am uncertain what this original place would be in an anti-essentialist understanding of identity held by social constructionist research. This notion of repetitively ("again") going backwards contrasts with the progression and development implied in construction and acquisition. If this journey of going backwards is central to the language used in identity literature (symbolised by the dominant use of "re-"), a question becomes, what is the trajectory and emotional character of this journey? "Re-" is used far more prevalently than the prefix "un-" which I call upon in the concept of undoing. However, "re-" also contains "a sense of 'undoing'" ("Online Etymology Dictionary," 2010). Therefore, exploring the undoing involved in pursuing one's identity is

perhaps not such a foreign concept to the field, and therefore it is worthy of further exploration.

Perhaps “un-” as a prefix has not been used in conceptualising the process of identity work as “un-” can mean “not” or the negative or opposite of the word it forms – for example, unseen, unformed, unfelt, and so on. In terms of undoing, this could be read as not doing, and if identity work is predicated on action and practice, such a prefix is not ideal. However, “un-” can also be used to intensify the force of a verb ("Online Etymology Dictionary," 2010), such as unloosen, therefore undoing can be understood as an intensive form of doing. It is this interpretation of “un-” that I want to emphasise as it conveys identity work as active and not intrinsically negative.

Overall, identity research by organisation studies scholars seems to be dominated by an assumption that identity work involves adding to, building onto, acquiring, sustaining, and regulating. While a few authors mention discarding or rejecting, we are yet to fully understand what this process of “doing away with” (in undoing terms) involves. There does not seem to be a noticeable strand of writing which refers to the unfastening or opening up of identity in organisation studies. The “identity work as violence” strand alludes to the destruction element of undoing. The contradictory idea of cleaving aspects of one’s identity (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005) is intriguing as on the one hand it means to adhere to or to be faithful to, and on the other hand it means to split, divide, and cut off ("Random House Dictionary," 2010) – an idea that has not been well developed in identity studies. Such contradictory and therefore rich terms as cleaving and undoing offer us a way of opening up identity studies in a way that emphasises more layers than the building metaphor, but also in a way that does not solely reduce it to its opposite – tearing down or deconstruction.

New Pathways for Constructionist Identity Theory

Based on my analysis of constructionist identity literature in organisation studies, I contend that identity work is commonly thought of as involving the putting together of parts, the adding of elements to one's identity, maintaining or protecting an identity one perceives as possessing, or the manufacturing of one's identity by external forces. Identity scholarship therefore seems to be trapped in the language of organisation (construction, acquisition, consolidation, and regulation). Broadening our repertoire to include language used by other disciplines could offer new ways of conceptualising identity. One such field is literary studies, as scholars here seem to be flirting with concepts similar to undoing. For example, in the introduction to *David Copperfield*, literary professor Jeremy Tambling (1996) says Dickens' masterpiece novel is "about the making (and unmaking) of identity" (p. vii). He goes on to say that "identity is unmade as fast as made" (p. viii), and is "unmade by the very act of writing, which is the death of identity" (p. viii). Writing is also "an attempt to catch up with loss" (p. ix) and in particular loss associated with the dispersion of one's identity; when one no longer feels discrete, coherent, fixed. Experiencing the loss of a fixed self, a dispersed identity, and moments of being unmade sound quite different to the portrayal of identity work dominating the literature at present.

Theorising the various ways in which identities are undone offers a series of different movements than the construction, acquisition, protection, and regulation discourses. That is, rather than focusing on the putting together of parts, an undoing lens looks for moments of unravelling and loosening up. It also pays attention to how aspects of one's identity can be discarded and let go of, rather than added to. Finally, it acknowledges the destructive practices that can exist, rather than the efforts to protect or maintain one's identity.

Whilst this thesis adopts the assumptions of a constructionist ontology, I am interested in exploring the multiple identities discourse, which has been largely underchallenged within constructionist identity writing. As the leadership programme I research promotes this view of identity (unlike the majority of functionalist or constructivist programmes), my thesis has a unique opportunity to engage with the following questions.

After reading the multiple identities literature, I cannot help but ask, how fluid are we really? How multiple and fractured am I? Encouraging people to refract themselves and develop a crystallised self provokes all sorts of questions which do not appear to have been strongly contended within the literature. Glass' (1993) book explores the consequences of literally living with multiple personalities (schizophrenia) in a post-modern world, and challenges the post-modern attractiveness of multiple selves. Gergen's (1991) concern regarding the consequences of living in a world "in which we no longer experience a secure sense of self" (p. 15) is still relevant here: what are the consequences of undoing people's perception of or need for a fixed and unified self? Whilst Tracy and Trethewey (2005) focus on the constructive elements of putting oneself in uncomfortable and non-expert positions, can this be felt and experienced in less constructive ways – can this undo people in ways we have not yet understood? Does striving to attain a crystallised self reinforce insecurities and ambiguities that writers such as Collinson (2003) have raised? If we are apparently preoccupied or obsessed with finding a stable, clearly defined, and coherent identity (Collinson, 2003), what are the consequences of disrupting this search, taking it away, and encouraging people to construct a multiple, fluid, open identity instead? Is there a risk that these individuals will "become the victims of their own identity-seeking preoccupations"? (Collinson, 2003, p. 533). These are questions this thesis will engage with as those who are promoting and developing a crystallised self have a responsibility to contend with such questions.

This chapter began by describing a constructionist approach to identity research that is increasingly being used in leadership and leadership development scholarship. It also informs the leadership development provider I focus on in my research. This version of identity work could be described as a “process of writing one’s own story, of being written by others, and of seeking to write oneself into the stories of others” (Sims, 2005, as cited in Beech, 2008, p. 54). This perspective recognises that an individual has a certain degree of agency in their identity work, although they can shape and be shaped by other people, discourses, ideologies, and so on. Identities are also assumed to be forged in relationships with other people, rather than occurring privately or internally. Finally, an individual is seen to move between a range of identities, rather than remaining static in one fixed identity. This chapter also establishes the concept of undoing as an alternative and different way of exploring identity work that has not been built adequately in the literature yet. By analysing the language of seminal studies, it seems that identity work is usually conceived of as processes of construction, acquisition, maintenance, and regulation. However, there are emerging voices which hint at moments of play, discarding, and destruction. I would like to build upon these alternative movements through the concept of undoing. In the next chapter I draw on literature from various disciplines to explore the scope and meaning of this term undoing.

CHAPTER 3

Theorising the Multiple Meanings of Undoing

This chapter pursues the scope of what undoing can mean. My intention in this chapter is to open up this word by exploring the multitude of meanings contained in this concept, rather than collapsing it down to a few selective definitions. I start with a dictionary definition of undoing, which although it may seem rudimentary, is necessary as it fleshes out the scope of this word. I use this definition as a guide but I am not constrained by it, preferring instead to look for other nuances visible in academic literature. As there is no comprehensive theory of undoing as an academic term, this chapter draws together possible meanings from several disciplines, such as organisation studies, anthropology, higher education, and psychoanalysis, to name a few. As a result of canvassing this literature, I propose that undoing can contain seven different meanings: unsettling; “negative magic”; unfastening; shedding; loss; stripping back; and destroying.

Defining Undoing

Like a concertina fan, undoing as a word reveals several layers of different meaning: on the one hand it refers to opening up, untying, and releasing, as in the sentence, to undo a knot. It also means to reverse, annul, and do away with something, such as to undo the damage of the storm. At the more extreme end, it refers to destruction and ruination, for example, his lying undid him. Finally, it means to unsettle or “throw into confusion” (“Random House Dictionary,” 2010). As a concept, then, undoing contains a diversity of interpretations and movements with which to explore identity work which have not been strongly theorised in detail, let alone in conjunction with each other, in the identity or leadership development literature.

Undoing as Unsettling

The word “undoing” is used in the title of several publications, usually in relation to undoing social phenomena characterised by power, tension, marginalisation, and so on. Notable texts include: *Undoing Gender* (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007); *Undoing the Social: Toward a Deconstruction of Sociology* (Game, 1991); *Undoing Culture: Globalisation, Postmodernism and Identity* (Featherstone, 1995); *Undoing Democracy: The Politics of Electoral Caudillismo* (Close, 2004); *Undoing Empire: Race and Nation in the Mulatto Caribbean* (Buscaglia-Salgado, 2003); *Undoing Harm: International Perspectives on Interventions for Men who do Violence Against Women* (Eliasson, 2004); *Undoing of Thought* (Finkelkraut, 1988); and *Undoing Whiteness in the Classroom* (Lea & Sims, 2008). At the time of writing this thesis, there was no published academic text or article called “Undoing Identity”. Despite undoing being used in the title of these books, a clear definition is rarely given; however, it is possible to analyse the implied meanings. Across these texts, the most prevalent understanding of undoing is to unsettle.

Broadly, undoing is mainly used in the texts listed above to represent unsettling, or throwing into confusion, the general perceptions of the topic under study. For example, Game introduces her book *Undoing the Social: Toward a Deconstruction of Sociology* by saying that its “aim is to unsettle” (p. x) and disperse disciplinary boundaries. It is no surprise, then, that many of these authors use paradigms which explicitly aim to unsettle such as post-structuralism, post-modernism, or social constructionism – as this thesis does. In the case of Deutsch’s (2007) article “Undoing Gender”, undoing signifies a hope of dismantling oppressive gender stereotypes, barriers, and inequalities. “Doing gender”, on the other hand, evokes conformity, or the notion of acting in accordance with stereotypes. I would like to hold this definition of undoing as unsettling and dismantling that which appears fixed or bounded, as it relates to the aim of social constructionist identity to unsettle the idea of fixed,

singular identities. Deutsch's article is also important as it portrays undoing as productive, emancipatory, and able to incite positive change; it is not inherently destructive.

Butler's book *Undoing Gender* (2004) also uses an unsettling interpretation of undoing as she explores "restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" (p. 1). One's personhood, as Butler terms it, can be undone by a normative conception of gender which undermines the ability to "persevere in a livable life" (p. 1). In other instances, the "experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim" (p. 1). So, becoming undone for Butler can be both a constraining experience which limits one's personhood, or an opening up, an enabling of a greater capacity to be. I would like to retain both of these possibilities for the nature of undoing as it suggests that undoing identities in a leadership development programme may feel at different times, and for different people, like a colonising or emancipatory experience.

Undoing as "Negative Magic"

Undoing is a term used by Sigmund Freud (1926) – and later his daughter Anna (1966) – to describe one of the several ego defence mechanisms. It sits alongside more popular concepts such as repression, projection, regression, and so forth. Undoing here is a characteristic of obsessional neurosis and involves the psychic process of undoing an unhealthy, traumatic, destructive, or threatening thought or action (and/or its consequences) by performing an opposite action (S. Freud, 1926). It is described as "negative magic" because when the action is undone, it is as though neither of the two actions had occurred, despite the fact that in reality they have (S. Freud, 1926). Freud would therefore disagree with Lady Macbeth's proclamation that "what's done cannot be undone" (Shakespeare, 1990, 5.1.65). In the case of traumatic life events, undoing can also explain the process whereby a person imagines how a

negative outcome (that has happened) could have been avoided. The person does not concentrate on the event and how it played out; rather, they fixate upon the hypothetical alternative in which the negative outcome does not happen (Davis, Lehman, Wortman, Cohen Silver, & Thompson, 1995). As a defence mechanism, undoing was never developed into a detailed or popular body of psychoanalytic theory – especially not when compared to the other defence mechanisms it is listed with such as repression and projection. Negative magic provides a description of the cognitive erasure and reversal processes that may be involved in undoing identity; however, I would like to differentiate my definition of undoing by extending it beyond just a cognitive reversal, to include relational and emotional processes.

Undoing as Unfastening and Opening up

Undoing can also be understood as being released from the idea that identity is fixed and static. The organisational theorist Roberts (2005) draws on Lacan and his contemporary Zizek when he argues that “we are held in place, and hold ourselves in place, through our attachment to identifications” (p. 639). He quotes Zizek’s phrase “striking against oneself” which people do not as:

a case of impotent aggressivity turned on oneself, rather [it] changes the coordinates of the situation in which the subject finds himself: by cutting himself loose from the precious object through whose possession the enemy kept him in check, the subject gains the space of free action (Zizek, 2000, as cited in Roberts, 2005, p. 639).

Therefore, this “striking” is a part of the “struggle against the deathly desire to fix and stabilize identity” (p. 639). This work highlights the voluntarism and determinism involved in undoing (we are held in place vs. hold ourselves in place). Like the unsettling definition, it reminds us that unfastening ourselves is more than a display of “impotent aggressivity”; rather, it can result in a greater “space of free action”.

Schein’s (1961) concept of “unfreezing” describes the process of “opening up one’s locked mind” (Kim, 1979, p. 202). Schein studied American civilian prisoners detained by Chinese

Communists, and created a social-psychological model to analyse the process by which these prisoners were coercively persuaded to believe and reproduce the ideology of their captors. Unfreezing is one of Schein's (1961) three stages of ego-identity change (changing and refreezing are the other two), and involves the dismantling, changing, or abandoning of identity through beliefs, values, and attitudes. The captor is tasked with "destroy[ing] the prisoner's self-image and base sense of identity" (Schein, 1961, p. 131), and inducing an "identity crisis" (p. 131). The prisoner re-establishes a new self by taking on the beliefs and attitudes of their captors. Although Schein argues that his model can be used in non-coercive settings, it is difficult to incorporate his constructivist, linear model (unfreeze, change, refreeze) into my thesis which seeks to explore a constructionist version of undoing. Overall, I have been struck by the dearth of theory which adequately explores the process of unfastening or opening up one's identity – especially from a social constructionist ontology, which signals the potential for theorising in this field.

Certain writers within the higher education literature describe how learning involves "breaking free" (Barnett, 2007, p. 44). That is, the student "breaks free" from "orderings and significations that are hers" in order to pursue a more authentic and creative way of "being" (p. 51). This involves taking hold of the educational experience in their own way, and attempting to make sense of it on their own, as well as "disencumber[ing]" themselves from "other voices and messages" (p. 51). Disencumbering refers to the "coming-into-oneself, of breaking free of surrounding voices and texts" (p. 44) in order to become more authentic. If the student is "committed" to this pursuit, they "break their own mould. She fashions herself into a new person" (p. 50), a more authentic person, who "leaps into the unknown" (p. 51). The assumption here is that by being released from the fixedness of other voices and texts, the students "come into themselves" (p. 126) and are more able to "live with uncertainty" (p. 127). While this can be an anxiety-inducing process, Barnett argues that such anxiety is an

“enlightening” and “necessary mode of being”, which enables the student to “come into himself, to find a new place to be” (p. 37). This literature suggests how undoing, if defined as releasing and opening up, necessarily involves alterations to one’s identity.

Following this line of literature, one of the roles of teachers and higher education institutions therefore is to “open alternative spaces” (Barnett, 2007, p. 153) in a topic, and particularly spaces of and for critique, so the students can experience it differently. Meyer and Land (2006) build upon this through their idea of a threshold concept, which is compared to a “portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something” (p. 3). The comprehension of a threshold concept, particularly philosophical insights (i.e. post-structuralism, Marxism etc.) results in a “reconstitution of the learner’s subjectivity” (p. 21) or a “transformation of personal identity” (p. 7). The effect of learning this concept is most likely irreversible, unforgettable, and difficult to unlearn: it is unlikely to be undone. Given that the leadership development programme this thesis focuses on uses critical and constructionist approaches to development, I wonder to what extent threshold concepts may be used to “undo” participants’ knowledge and therefore their identity.

Undoing as Shedding

The words discarding and shedding provide interesting avenues for exploring undoing. Ibarra (1999) briefly refers to how an individual discards unsuitable selves in their pursuit of a repertoire of possible selves. In a later article, Ibarra and colleagues (2010) mention how leadership development participants “shed the outdated identities that hinder change” (p. 673); however, the process of how this is achieved is not explicated. In their research of an African leadership programme, Bolden and Kirk (2005) describe how these African leaders had to “shed” perceptions of leadership they held which were “negative, exhaustive, and inhibiting” (p. 7). The assumption here is that in shedding these “unhelpful” images, they

became more “integrated”, “affirmative”, and “inclusive” (p. 7). Discarding knowledge and perceptions is a central aspect of organisational and individual unlearning literature (Hedberg, 1991). Such literature suggests that individuals or organisations discard “obsolete and misleading knowledge” that presents “formidable barriers to learning” (Becker, 2005, p. 660). I return to this literature in the ‘Undoing as Loss’ section.

Mead (1934) describes the discarding of certain parts of one’s self in the case of a professor who disappeared and showed up later in a logging camp. He had “freed himself” of his occupation and escaped to the forest where he felt more at home (although Gergen (1991) contests that in the postmodern age there is no such place we can return to). The professor had to engage in “recognising the lines of cleavage that run through us”; the “leaving out of the rest of the self”; “getting rid of certain bodily memories which would identify the individual to himself”; “get[ting] rid of certain things the self is bound up with” and “relinquish[ing] that part of the self” (p. 143). This writing draws our attention to the agency involved in undoing (we free ourselves), the embodied and cognitive nature of undoing (“bodily memories”), and the idea that undoing identity involves giving up possessions – which contrasts with the definition of identity work as accumulating elements of our identity repertoires which we maintain, and protect.

Deprogramming also has links with the concept of undoing as it is the attempt to reverse or annul the effects of a brainwashed person (Kim, 1979). It assumes that a person has experienced conversion to a new creed (usually religious) under the influence of deception, hypnosis, or drugs. After this conversion they are psychologically enslaved, unable to act independently of the manipulator’s directives, and therefore a deprogramming process reversal is required to reinstate their free will and rational choice (Shupe Jr, Spielmann, & Stigall, 1977). They then undergo what can be confrontational, emotional, physical, and

violent activities, “until the presumed effects of the given sect’s or cult’s influence are *undone* [emphasis added]” (Shupe Jr et al., 1977, p. 941).

Deprogramming usually involves a stripping process which confuses the individual’s assumptions about reality and identity. Kim (1979) describes deprogramming as an “alternation process” in which one is “led to dismantle and disintegrate the nomic structure of his/her subjective reality and, then, switches to another world – a new or the previously held reality” (p. 197). Deprogramming has been shown to produce “identity transformation” (p. 197) in a short time period, although there have been medical, ethical, and legal critiques of this process as it is involuntary, coercive, and violent. Therefore, whilst deprogramming highlights the collective nature of reversing aspects of one’s identity, and the power dynamics that can be involved in this process, the involuntary and violent aspects sharply differentiate it from leadership development. The stripping back in deprogramming leads me to the next definition of undoing.

Undoing as Loss

A faint but intriguing strand of research refers to the loss and letting go involved in development. In his constructivist theory of adult development, Kegan (1980) describes this loss as a loss of “how I am composed”, arising from the individual “surrendering the balance between self and other through which I have ‘known’ the world”, and therefore this is felt as a “loss of myself, my fundamental relatedness to the world, and meaning itself” (p. 374). Van Velsor and Drath (2004) bring Kegan’s notion of “developmental loss” into their leadership development framework and say that:

Because we see development as the forming of a whole new way of understanding oneself and one’s life, we recognize that development is not simply the acquisition of a new way but also the loss of an old and comfortable way of understanding. As such, it elicits both elation and grief (p. 397).

This quote highlights the idea that in order to understand oneself in a “whole new way”, development involves the loss of “old and comfortable ways of understanding” and therefore counters the assumption that development is centred on acquisition. Importantly, this quote draws attention to both the “elation” and “grief” that can come with development and loss. Loss therefore seems intricately tied up with knowledge and identity: what is given up is ways of “understanding oneself”. Van Velsor and Drath (2004) propose that an individual gives up their beliefs (and takes on new ones) once they realise that they no longer know who they are; if they have a secure sense of self they are unlikely to give up beliefs about their self. Karl Weick (1996) uses two different incidents of fire-fighters who perished because they were not able to outrun exploding fires. They would have had a greater chance of survival if they had dropped their heavy tools. His article therefore uses this allegory of dropping one’s tools and applies it to organisational researchers. He explores why people are reluctant to drop their tools. One of these reasons is identity: tools are central to a person’s sense of identity and therefore people are reluctant to drop them: “without my tools who am I? A coward? A fool?” (Weick, 1996, p. 308). Knowing which tools to drop and when therefore could be central to leadership development. The dropping of concepts and assumptions which are fused with identity could be vital aspects of being undone.

A range of value judgements are made about this loss and letting go. Firstly, that which needs to be given up is seen as “bad habits”, “self-destructive”, and “barriers to progress” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 27). These ways of knowing and understanding are “barriers” and therefore it is only when they are let go that the leader can “begin to acquire the knowledge and experience that will lead to new beliefs and conclusions and ultimately to new, more productive behaviours” (Fulmer & Goldsmith, 2001, p. 4). They have been weighed down by these tools, and without them they can be more agile and light (Weick, 1996). This assumption is also found in the organisational unlearning literature where the majority of

definitions refer to discarding that which is “obsolete, misleading, redundant, or unsuccessful” (Tsang & Zahra, 2008, p. 1437), which implies that getting rid of these encumbrances leads to better organisational performance. An individual must be stripped back and cleansed of their problematic and limiting beliefs before they can be refashioned “anew” – much like the liminality literature suggests (Turner, 1969, 1974; van Gennep, 1960).

A value judgement is also made about the nature of the loss or letting go process. Van Velsor and Drath (2004) see developmental loss as counterproductive and negative: “it can actually block development” and cause a person to feel “stuck” (p. 397). It is “frustrating or even debilitating” (p. 397). Individual unlearning is described as “a cumbersome and energy-consuming process” (Hedburg, 1981, as cited in Tsang & Zahra, 2008, p. 1445). I propose that loss and letting go is not intrinsically negative, and invite portrayals which at least emphasise the euphoria, “elation” (Van Velsor & Drath, 2004, p. 397), and relief of letting go – and ideally explore the range of emotions between these two poles.

Furthermore, it is assumed that something replaces that which has been discarded (Tsang & Zahra, 2008). Weick’s (2007) call to management researchers and educationalists to “drop your tools” (p. 5) is predicated on the assumption that one drops tools in order to “gain lightness, agility, and wisdom” (p. 6). In their discussion of organisational unlearning, Tsang and Zahra (2008) suggest that nothing may replace that which is discarded, but if it is jettisoned, the new routines or knowledge may not be better, and therefore unlearning does not necessarily lead to better organisational performance. This caveat is important for theorising undoing, as it signals that individuals may reach a moment where they feel entirely unravelled or destroyed and feel they have no pieces to put back together. It also reminds us that undoing may not be an intrinsically positive process as individuals are not guaranteed to become a better person.

Undoing as Stripping Back

The stripping back process involved in rites of passage provides another definition of undoing. Van Gennep identified three distinct phases relating to the rites of passage: pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal (van Gennep, 1960). The first stage involves rites that strip back, cleanse, and purify the subject of pre-liminal attributes before they enter the liminal space/stage (Turner, 1969). These rites aim to turn the individual into a blank slate, *tabula rasa*, so that the knowledge and wisdom pertaining to their new status can be inscribed upon them: “people are *being reduced or ground down* [emphasis added] to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (Turner, 1969, p. 81). This process “*refashions the very being* [emphasis added] of the neophyte” (Turner, 1969, p. 89).

This idea of breaking someone down and building them up is often achieved by “ordeals and humiliations often of a grossly physiological character” (Turner, 1969, p. 89). These ordeals represent:

A *destruction* [emphasis added] of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society (Turner, 1969, pp. 89–90).

The language in this quote – destruction, restrain, abuse, mere matter – links with the literature that portrays identity work as violence. Similarly, this stripping back literature describes undoing being done to participants. Countering this victim positioning, however, is the argument that the state of limbo that accompanies stripping back may actually be enjoyable, one in which inhabitants are reluctant to leave as liminality can offer a “sense of freedom, a possibility of creation, a special sense of community with the others in the limbo” (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003, p. 272). Whilst liminality literature is undoubtedly important, I suggest that undoing does not necessarily follow a linear progression from one stage to

another (i.e. pre-liminal to liminal to post-liminal). I am also weary of assuming that leadership development is a liminal setting: on the one hand, it is liminal in the sense that it disrupts and unsettles an individual's sense of self (Beech, 2011); on the other hand, it may not contain the complete phases (separation, liminality, aggregation), nor the existence of overt rituals, nor may it refashion the "very being" of the participants (Turner, 1969, p. 89). Therefore, whilst this concept of undoing certainly resonates with liminality concepts, and may indeed be created due to liminal features, because of the differences identified above, I wish to demarcate undoing as a phenomenon worthy of exploration in its own right.

Undoing as Destroying or Ruining

The only literature that seems to tackle the idea of destroying identity is based on extreme contexts – most commonly those fitting Goffman's notion of the total institution, such as the military and elite forces (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2006), mental institutions (Goffman, 1961), cults (Kim, 1979), and so on. In reviewing this literature I am not claiming that leadership development programmes are total institutions. I use this writing merely to refer to what is currently known – and the expansive room for theorising this process in more subtle and nuanced ways.

The military and special forces are an obvious context in which individuals (i.e. new recruits) go through deconstruction of their identity. In their description of military culture, Soeters and colleagues (2006) highlight the soldierisation process that involves "degradation or "mortification", in which the new recruit's civilian status is deconstructed, and is subsequently "rebuilt' i.e. given a new identity" (p. 250). Their sense of who they are and how they need to be in this total institution is overhauled: they are broken down in order to be built back up with the military values. Cult military films such as *Full Metal Jacket* depict such initiation rites.

Brainwashing (Hunter, 1951), or thought reform (Lifton, 1961), is the group of practices which deprogramming arose to annul, and could describe the ruination or sully of identity. It refers to the process whereby cult members use coercive means and deprivation to exercise mind control over new converts – “stripping their previous identities, neutralizing their powers of will, creating dependence on the cult, and programming them with their cult beliefs” (Long & Hadden, 1983, p. 1).

A little closer to home, the organisational socialisation⁴ literature, or what Van Maanen terms “people processing” (1978, p. 19) contains a process relevant to destruction: divestiture. Van Maanen and Schein argue that this is part of the socialisation process in which certain personal characteristics of the “recruit’s incoming identity are denied or stripped away” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977, p. 64). For example, they may have to sever old friendships, routinely perform the “dirty work”, and undergo harassment. These activities:

Disconfirm many aspects of the recruit’s entering self-image, thus beginning the process of rebuilding the individual’s self-image based upon new assumptions. Often these assumptions arise from the recruit’s own discovery, gradual or dramatic, that they have an ability to do things they had not thought themselves able to do previously (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977, p. 65).

Divestiture therefore involves the disconfirming of the recruit’s incoming identity, after which they rebuild their self-image based on “new assumptions” they have discovered, which may induce greater self-esteem and confidence. Recruits can voluntarily participate in these experiences if they strongly desire to become an accepted member of the organisation or group – such as law and medical schools, religious groups, military organisations, professional athletics teams, and so on. Whilst these activities can be “identity-destroying”, they can also be “identity-bestowing” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977, p. 66) as they can be “a

⁴ Socialisation is the process whereby new members to a group learn and internalise the norms and values of the social group (Long & Hadden, 1983).

device for stimulating personal changes that are evaluated positively by the individual” (Van Maanen, 1978, pp. 34–5). Recruits can also form strong attachments to this new identity and to each other as “the endurance of the divestiture process itself promotes a strong fellowship among those who have followed the same path to membership” (Van Maanen, 1978, p. 34). This writing draws our attention to how people can voluntarily engage in identity-destroying practices if they believe it will lead to adopting a desirable identity. It also highlights how fellowship can be created amongst those who have endured their identity being undone, and could provide a new insight into the intense level of bonding and community felt by some participants on leadership development programmes.

This chapter has travelled to fields and contexts well outside leadership development in order to offer seven ways in which undoing can be understood: unsettling; “negative magic”; unfastening; shedding; loss; stripping back; and destroying. I carry this overall conceptualisation with me as I move forward to my empirical material chapters, with a curiosity to discover how my material confirms, denies, and/or extends these seven discourses. Before I do so, I draw upon a passage from Judith Butler (2004) in order to capture the overarching magnitude of what I mean by this term undoing. Butler gives the example of a loved one dying, and explains how the “transformative effect of loss” will change the mourner in unpredictable ways. She uses this example to describe how:

We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel (p. 19).

Although Butler is talking about death, this passage emphasises the undeniable relationality of undoing identity (“we’re undone by each other”). The phrase “one does not always stay intact” succinctly summarises undoing as a falling apart, a breaking down, an opening up. It

can also be a visceral, embodied, emotional experience (the touch, scent, feel, memory). Her passage also highlights a tension between resisting being undone, “despite one’s best efforts”, and inviting being undone, “one wants to”. This alludes to the various ways that people can work with identity (resists, invites, succumbs). Her quote also underlines the loss (“grief”) involved in undoing, referred to in the ‘Undoing as Loss’ section. Finally, Butler declares that undoing is a fundamental part of being human (“if we’re not, we’re missing something”), which cements this topic as a vital area to understand in greater depth than it is captured in academic knowledge at present.

Summary of Literature Review

This chapter also draws to a close my review and analysis of literature. My hope is that I have demonstrated how this thesis makes an original contribution to leadership development and identity theory through the concept of undoing. In order to pursue this intention, I began with an exploration of the various approaches to leadership development scholarship (functionalist, constructivist, and constructionist). I highlighted the assumptions each approach seems to hold regarding development and self/identity. Across all three approaches there seems to be a favoured interpretation that leadership development involves acquisition, gain, expansion, forward progression, and discovery of the inner self. The participant seems to be likened to a tool box, or someone climbing a ladder. Identity therefore is another tool one can add to their tool box and deploy when needed, or it is segmented into different rungs on a ladder one can progress up. Constructionist approaches seem to challenge these conceptualisations of identity and development, as they do not assume that either of these concepts are as linear, essentialist, cognitive, or stable as we tend to think. Such research tends to explore how identity work can be playful, anxious, unresolved, and regulated by others. While there is some talk of the loss, rupture, and struggle involved in identity work undertaken during leadership development, on the whole the literature tends to focus on the

“wrapping up” definition of “to develop”, rather than its other definition, “to undo”. This thesis therefore intends to balance this focus by building a conceptualisation of how undoing may occur in development.

I adopted a similar analytic approach in the second chapter, which is focused on identity studies by organisational researchers. My intention here was to describe a constructionist approach to identity. I have chosen this approach as it seems most able to support the alternative framing of identity this thesis wishes to build. The task here was to analyse the language of constructionist accounts of identity research in order to build a picture of how identity work is currently framed. I offer 10 such framings, and propose that identity work is largely conceptualised as involving moments of construction, acquisition, maintenance, and regulation. Whilst this research is certainly important, my research participants seemed to experience quite different movements in their identity work – movements which seem opposite to these four (i.e. deconstruction, loss, destabilisation, fragmentation, and so on). This chapter therefore proposes that undoing could be one term which is able to account for these alternative aspects of identity work. It offers an original contribution to theory, and also speaks to the experiences of those involved in undertaking leadership development.

My final literature chapter offers a conceptualisation of undoing – a term that has not been theorised in a sustained or abundant manner. I draw from a range of academic disciplines in order to proliferate the numerous ways in which undoing can be understood. I carry these seven meanings forth as guides for my analysis of the empirical material, yet I will also be attentive to the other ways in which undoing may be experienced that are not presently accounted for in academic literature. As such, this thesis now moves into discussions about my research design. The next two chapters describe the methodological choices this thesis has made in order to pursue my research questions. I begin with an elaboration of social

constructionism and the implications this epistemological positioning has for my methodology.

CHAPTER 4

The Methodological Influences of Social Constructionism

Whilst there is an “extensive” body of leadership literature that adopts a social constructionist approach (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 172) it is by no means common in leadership development scholarship, which is populated by functionalist and constructivist orientations (Carroll & Levy, 2010). Considering social constructionism is an established paradigm within both leadership and identity studies, it seems a viable decision to bring this lens to leadership development research – a decision that is supported by an emerging number of researchers (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Gagnon, 2008; Sinclair, 2009). This thesis therefore joins a growing number of voices who wish to use social constructionism in order to offer different interpretations of leadership development. Rather than go into detail about the philosophy of social constructionism (see Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, for such writing) my endeavour in this chapter is to be specific about the assumptions such a paradigm holds, and how it influenced my research choices. After describing some of the key tenets of social constructionism, I describe the particular version this thesis favours, one that is sensitive to issues of power and discourse. I also demarcate the limits of such an approach, as it is necessary to acknowledge that one paradigm cannot provide a complete picture of a phenomenon (Fairhurst, 2007).

Key Assumptions

The roots of social constructionism are commonly traced to Mead’s symbolic interactionism and Shutz’s phenomenology; however, it is to Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality* that most credit is due. Since the publication of this book, scholars from a range of disciplines such as sociology, literary studies, anthropology, women’s studies, history, psychology, and cultural studies have adopted – and adapted – this

perspective. Although, as Deetz notes (Newton, Deetz, & Reed, 2011), social constructionism as we know it today – and how it is used in this thesis – differs markedly from Berger and Luckmann’s treatise. Such a diversity of disciplines means that there is no one agreed-upon conceptualisation of social constructionism – rather, there are a variety of social constructionisms (Ford & Lawler, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

Leadership scholars have taken social constructionism down various paths, offering “more nuanced interpretations of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings” (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 125), incorporating fields such as critical theory, discourse, post-structuralism, ethnography, ethnomethodology, and relationally orientated work. However, Fairhurst and Grant (2010) warn that the dramatic growth of literature on the social construction of leadership has “been at some cost” as “the language of social constructionism is often used indiscriminately; too many studies offer up broad, non-specific definitions, underspecified constructs and a bewildering array of methods, approaches and perspectives” (pp. 172–3). To counter this dilution of use, it is necessary for writers to specify their definition, assumptions, and “flavour” of social constructionism. I now turn to mine.

Some authors argue that despite the variations in social constructionist research, some basic tenets or assumptions can be identified (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Ford & Lawler, 2007; Sandberg, 2001). At a broad level, such a perspective believes that all aspects of social reality (i.e. leadership development and identity) “can be seen as socially defined through ongoing actions, negotiations and agreements” (Sandberg, 2001, p. 29). Therefore, it rejects a series of assumptions underpinning positivist or critical realist research. The first regards the nature of reality. While an objectivist epistemology argues that there is a reality beyond human consciousness that can be monitored and captured, social constructionism argues that reality is not an objectifiable truth “waiting to be uncovered through positivistic scientific enquiry” (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 174). It is impossible to produce descriptions of reality which are

not influenced by our historical, cultural, and linguistic perceptions (Sandberg, 2001). Therefore, there are multiple realities (and therefore multiple truths) that are constructed through negotiations between social agents, including the researcher. These multiple realities each vie for legitimacy and authority, and certain constructions may become more taken-for-granted than others (Hacking, 1999).

The social constructionist researcher therefore does not (and cannot) subscribe to the belief that their role is to uncover objectifiable reality; rather, they are a co-constructor of meaning. By attempting to “understand the phenomenon *through the lived experiences of those who live it*” (Thomas & Linstead, 2002, p. 76, authors’ emphasis), the research participant is seen as a “practical author”, and the researcher’s interpretation “is a construction of these meanings, offering a construction of the constructions of the actors studied” (Thomas & Linstead, 2002, p. 77). Reflexive disclosures regarding the role, influence, and choices of the researcher are therefore important to disclose in this type of research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

This leads to the next assumption that knowledge is co-constructed through ongoing negotiated social interactions between people. This social epistemology challenges paradigms that privilege the individual as creating and holding knowledge about reality (Sandberg, 2001). Instead, knowledge is not “a private achievement but owes its origins to community participation” (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003, p. 3). Social constructionism therefore places great emphasis on the relational, intersubjective, and dialogic creation of meaning – it occurs between people rather than within people’s heads (Cunliffe, 2008). Interactions and situations often form the unit of analysis for this research, rather than focusing on the individual’s mind isolated from other people and their context (Fairhurst, 2009). Furthermore, because reality is negotiated between people, knowledge is not fixed; rather, it is assumed to be in flux, contested, unresolved, and shifting across time (Cunliffe, 2008).

Lastly, given the previous assumptions, it follows that most social constructionist researchers reject the idea that language is a mirror or portal to objective reality (Sandberg, 2001). Rather, language is seen as a vital topic of investigation in order to understand how we negotiate and construct reality, knowledge, and meaning (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Leadership researchers following this paradigm pay close attention to the language used by leaders, the conversations between leaders and followers, the language of leadership in the media, and so on (Sandberg, 2001). The extent to which language constitutes reality is a point of contestation amongst social constructionist researchers. I will elaborate upon the particular interpretation of language and discourse I use later in this chapter.

One question that remains is what are the advantages of using a constructionist approach to leadership research, and specifically to leadership development research? Tourish and Barge (2010) contemplate this broader question in a series of letters published in *Management Communication Quarterly*. They believe that social constructionist research “allows us to get at the complexity, contradictions, and paradoxes that constitute the hurly-burly of lived experiences in ways that other approaches do not” (p. 335). It invites researchers to curiously explore the tensions, paradoxes, practices, and (un)intended consequences of leadership in action and context. Importantly, it encourages researchers to explore the “multiversity of leadership” (p. 333), rather than confining the complexity of this phenomenon to a supposed singular truth. This means researchers seek out and articulate the multitude of voices that exist in a research setting. It also requires researchers to hold a “both-and position” (p. 333) toward leadership, theorising the ways in which leadership can be both positive and negative, constraining and enabling, rather than fixing it in either stance.

Bringing a social constructionist gaze to leadership development research attempts to reshape the theory and practice of leadership development, which tends to focus on skill building and competency acquisition (Carroll & Levy, 2010). It does so by exploring the complexity of

this setting, rather than denying it, and in particular it searches for the multitude of shifting and contradictory discourses that construct such a site. Therefore, constructionist research may build the capacity of developers and participants to work in such a complex field (Carroll & Levy, 2010). It also invites researchers to explore their role in the co-construction of knowledge, and to reflect upon their experiences in the leadership development setting (Sinclair, 2009). Overall, a constructionist orientation creates the “space for freer and bolder ways of interacting with the material” (Grant & Hardy, 2003, p. 9).

Holding these assumptions and potential advantages of constructionist research in mind, I wish to build from them to fashion a particular “flavour” of social construction which incorporates aspects of Critical Management Studies (CMS), or what Hosking (2008) calls, critical social constructionism.

Delineating a Critical Social Constructionist Approach

I wish to shape a form of critical social constructionism that is sensitive to power and discourse in the research context and process. There is much variation and contestation in the use of the term “critical” in organisation studies (see Böhm, 2007, for an analysis of how it has been used/misused). I position my use within the umbrella of CMS, and in particular what Alvesson (2008) terms “CMS mainstream or middle position, which is a “sensible” version of post-structuralism.⁵ Such an interpretation entails:

A moderate version of constructionism, some interest in ‘reality out there’, some in ideologies/discourses and subjectivity plus some interest in the specifics and details of language, but without driving it too far (a linguistic half turn, perhaps) (Alvesson, 2008, p. 17).

That is, I am interested in exploring the role that language and discourse play in constituting reality and identity, and I wish to explore this interplay in an empirical setting, whilst holding a tentativeness and uncertainty about the extent of their influence.

⁵ Although, I accept that some post-structuralists may object to this diluted version (C. Jones, 2009).

Alvesson (2008) provides a useful working definition for doing CMS “middle” research. This research questions the “4 Is”: ideologies, institutions, interests, and identities that are “assessed to be (a) dominant, (b) harmful and (c) underchallenged” (p. 18). My research therefore explores an underchallenged and arguably dominant institution (leadership development programmes), and the ideologies that they hold and enact about identity and identity work. While most CMS research focuses on the “harmful” aspect and therefore constructs a picture of organisations as “dark and gloomy” (Alvesson, 2008, p. 22), incorporating a CMS lens means that I can also perceive leadership development (or organisations in general) as having both positive and negative impacts. That is, they have the potential to liberate participants from oppressive leadership identities and realities, free them from constraining anxieties or insecurities, and support them by providing better ways of being, doing, and knowing in their leadership and organisations (Alvesson, 2008). However, in some instances leadership development programmes can have negative consequences: they may contribute to conformism, exploitation, produce and reproduce inequalities, prevent free thinking, induce lower self-esteem, and bind participants and facilitators to destructive identities (Alvesson, 2008). It is because of these potentially negative aspects that CMS researchers approach their research context with suspicion or agnosticism (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). My hope is that the concept of undoing allows me to hold a “both-and” orientation, where I can capture the more debilitating forms of undoing, as well as those that are more liberating and exciting.

CMS researchers often “stand on the weaker part’s side”, which is usually interpreted as that of the employees or workers (Alvesson, 2008, p. 13). In the case of leadership development, the participants may be assumed to be the less powerful actors (Gagnon, 2008). While I started my fieldwork positioning the facilitation team as the more powerful actors, this stance diluted as I observed acts of resistance, confrontation, and invitation by the participants.

While the facilitators are certainly powerful, so too are the participants; therefore, to portray them as “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1977, p. 132) would be a misleading simplification. As above, I would like to hold a both framings simultaneously in order to acknowledge that both facilitators and participants occupy precarious positions of vulnerability and strength, influence and conformity.

Any critically orientated project needs to make explicit the particular interpretation of power it carries. This thesis draws on Foucauldian influences and sees power as a relational process, not “one way or uncontested” (Hosking, 2008, p. 671). This builds on the previous paragraph that describes how participants and facilitators are involved in the production and enactment of power. Power is therefore an “ongoing, relational construction, able to both open up and to close down possibilities” (Hosking, 2008, p. 671). In his book *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault describes how power can be both a positive and productive force, as well as debilitating and repressive. In addition, power is not conceived of as a property belonging to one person, “a privilege that one may possess” (p. 26); rather, it is evident when it is exercised in a network of relations. Power therefore is not the domain of the dominant class; rather, all of the “depths of society” can exercise, shift, and resist power and its operations (p. 27). This means that wherever there is the exercise of power, there is also the possibility of its resistance. Therefore, I am interested in the relational power dynamics involved in establishing and negotiating undoing and the various ways in which power is deflected, ignored, resisted, relinquished, and so on in processes of undoing. I am interested in how power shifts beyond binaries such as participant/facilitator. I acknowledge that my interest in power fits under what Fairhurst and Grant (2010) term pragmatic intervention as it is “more lightly sketched” rather than an “overriding” focus (p. 189). Rather than using power as the primary lens for analysing my material, I “tread more lightly on power dynamics to stay

within the logics, grammars, and tasks of the participants involved” (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 191).

Foregrounding Discourse

As previously suggested, the role of language and discourse is a central – and contested – tenet of constructionist research. For most discursive writers, language is no longer seen as a simple mechanism for mirroring reality; rather, language itself has become a vital and active means of constructing social reality (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b). Such researchers, of which I am one, “share the conviction that language is poorly understood if viewed as a simple medium for the mirroring of objective reality through passively transporting data” (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b, p. 142). This section explores what discourse means in the context of this thesis, and how it applies to my research decisions.

Prior to my fieldwork, I did not envision using a discursive approach. A few months into my fieldwork I realised that the leadership programme I was observing was a “speech communit[y]” (Barley, 1983, as cited in Samra-Fredericks, 2008), in which the participants “dwell in language” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 198). Leadership development, for both participants and facilitators, is not done “alone but in continual conversations with all the others who are involved” (Shotter, 1993, p. 152). Following Chia’s (2000) line of reasoning, social phenomena such as leadership development and identity do not have “a straightforward and unproblematic existence independent of our discursively-shaped understanding” (p. 513).

The participants drew my attention to the resounding role that language has in their experience of the programme, often commenting on the language the facilitators used, making jokes about the metaphors and concepts, and at times fighting against this language. The facilitators also discussed at length the connotations of their language, often playing around with different words in order to elicit a different impact. Therefore, it seemed to me

that an analysis of this leadership development programme could benefit from paying attention to discourse. Although, I admit that to a certain extent my qualitative research design set up an eventual “linguistic turn” as Alvesson and Kärreman (2000b) rightly state, “there are few occasions and events accessible to the organizational researcher that are not infused, ingrained, and embedded in talk” (p. 148).

Defining discourse

Due to the various ways in which discourse is defined, it is necessary to outline the definition adopted by this thesis. I draw on the definition provided by renowned discourse scholars David Grant and Cynthia Hardy (2003), where organisational discourse relates to:

Structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artefacts) that bring organisationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed (p. 6).

This definition describes how discursive texts can be written or verbal, and play some part in constituting subjectivities, actions, and realities. In my case, discourse includes situated talk evidenced at and around residential workshops, online written interactions, and written reflective assignments. These forms of discourse can provide clues to extra-linguistic issues and also allow interpretation beyond the level of the text (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b). Such discursive texts may provide insights into symbolic elements of organisational realities, structural aspects of work, and interactive elements of constructing and maintaining certain selves (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008). Furthermore, I agree with Fairclough and Wodak (1997) that discourse is produced and understood in particular context(s).

As the definition above suggests, I assume a relationship between discourse, power, and identity: discourse brings into being certain forms of knowledge, forms of self, social relationships, and conceptual frameworks (Fairclough, 1992). The following quote is

significant as it succinctly highlights the various dimensions to discourse that are important to this thesis:

Discourse helps to construct reality through the way it “rules in’ certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write or conduct oneself” and also “rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it’ (Hall, 2001: 77)” (Grant & Hardy, 2003, p. 6).

That is, reality is structured by a number of boundaries, which enable and restrict, encourage and confine how the participants talk about and enact their identity and identity work. In other words, discourses “make certain ways of thinking and acting possible, and others impossible or costly” (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004, p. 638). A discursive approach therefore could look at which forms of identity work are ruled in and which are ruled out in leadership development programmes. This thesis suggests that discourses of undoing seem to be “ruled in”. I am cautious about presumptuously assuming the strength of this connection, a point which I address in the next section where I build this definition of discourse through an approach called “meso-discourse”.

A meso-discourse approach

Researchers new to discourse have to make a dizzying array of choices. Does language represent reality, or does it construct it? (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Which approach should I adopt, instrumental, interpretive or critical? (Heracleous & Hendry, 2000). Will I include non-discursive data in my definition? (Grant & Iedema, 2005). What role does context play? (Fairhurst, 2009). Where do I sit in the agency vs. structure debate? (Putnam & Cooren, 2004). Am I focusing on the language itself, language in use, or the production of texts? (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b). After reading a number of conceptual writings about discourse, the “disparate and fragmented” (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004, p. 2)

nature of the field left me questioning what I thought I knew and why I would incorporate a discursive element in my own research.

Left with such uncertainty, it was not until I re-read Alvesson and Kärreman's (2000a, 2000b) seminal articles, that I felt some sense of clarity and direction. So, I have chosen to use their framing of discursive approaches as the foundation for my approach. While Grant and Iedema (2005) have critiqued this framework for limiting the range of dimensions one approach can straddle simultaneously, I find it a useful scaffolding upon which to structure my orientation.

Their coining of "little d" discourse and "capital D" Discourse is now an oft-cited distinction. Little "d" discourse is the study of talk and written text in everyday interaction in organisations. This perspective sees discourses as local achievements that are analytically distinct from other levels of social reality (i.e. meaning and practice) and context-dependent (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b). In contrast, "capital D" Discourses are viewed as "general and prevalent systems for the formation and articulation of ideas in a particular period of time" (2000b, p. 1126). Social reality therefore is constructed and maintained through "historically situated discursive moves" (2000b, p. 1126). Another way of describing this distinction is that micro approaches focus on the how of in situ relations, rather than the "why of the more durable power relations that contextualize such relations" (Grant, Iedema, & Oswick, 2009, p. 216).

Using this d/D distinction, Alvesson and Kärreman (2000b) construct a discursive ladder, which pins "micro-discourse" at one end, and "mega-Discourse" at the other – and a range in between (meso-discourse approach, Grand Discourse approach). Each of these approaches offers a different relationship between discourse and meaning, and the level of attention paid to a specific context and details. Figure 1 below reproduces this discursive ladder,

highlighting the choices made in this thesis. The authors warn against “muscular” treatments of discourse that envision a “fragile subject and discourse-driven social reality” and can gloss over the operations of discourse (p. 1145). At the same time, they highlight the trap of linguistic reductionism in which talk is myopically focused on without regard for individuals and/or the social context.

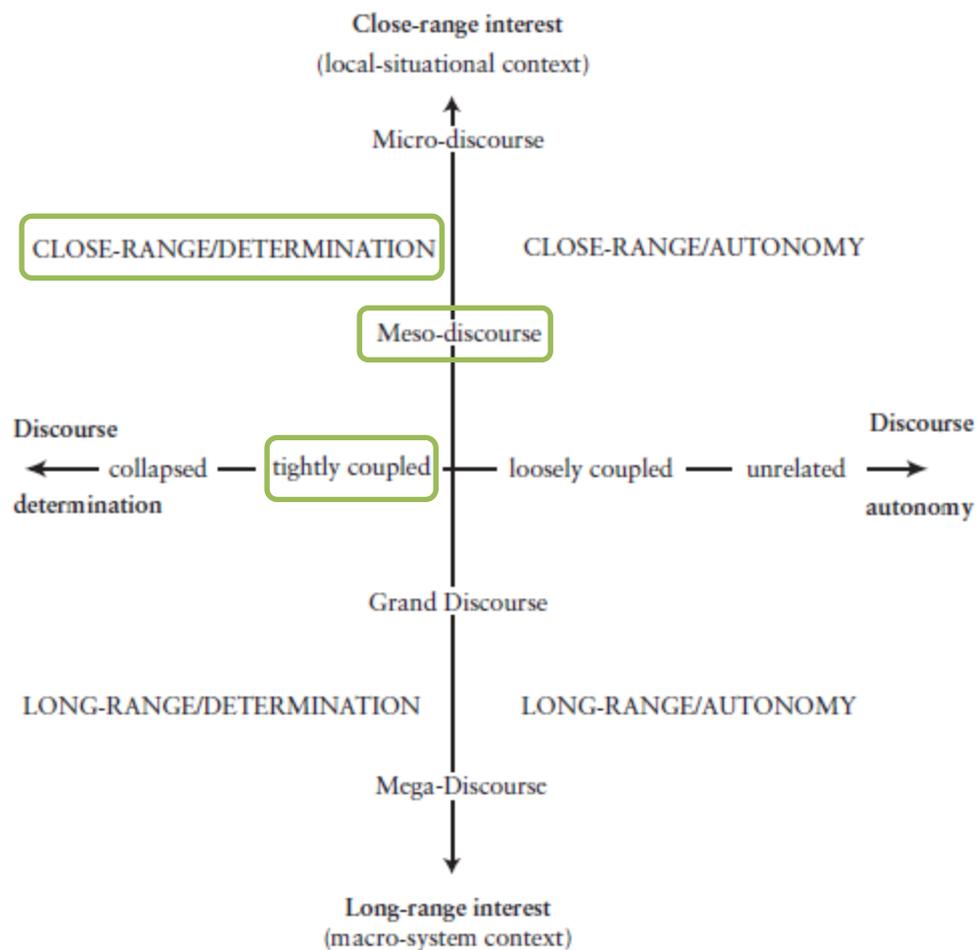


Figure 1. Overview of the discursive ladder showing core dimensions and positions in discourse studies. The green boxes highlight the positions taken in this thesis. Adapted from “Varieties of discourse: On the study of organizations through discourse analysis” by M. Alvesson and D. Kärreman, 2000b, *Human Relations*, 53(9), p. 1135. The Tavistock Institute, 2000. Reprinted with permission.

The position I adopt for this thesis is based on the meso-discourse level. A meso-discourse approach is “relatively sensitive to language use in context but interested in finding broader

patterns and going beyond the details of the text and generalizing to similar contexts” (p. 1133). That is, I examine the claims and logic of a given text and attempt to explore the expression of meaning given by the participants. While I focus on one leadership development programme, I am interested in the extent to which it points to similar experiences in other leadership development programmes. In comparison with micro-discourse, meso-discourse goes beyond the immediate micro-context, but does not abstract as far as the mega-Discourse approach.

As I am adopting a meso-discourse approach, I am using what Alvesson and Kärreman (2000b) term a close-range/determination notion of discourse. This means I hold a “tightly coupled” view of discourse determination (but not “collapsed”), and I am primarily looking at discourse in a local setting (a leadership development programme) rather than a longer-range view. This determination view of discourse means that I assume that discursive texts (i.e. interactions, written assignments) have some structuring influences on how the participant relates to the world and their actions in it, although these effects may be temporary, and particular to certain contexts (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b). As this is a core assumption of this thesis, I build on it in the next section.

Discourse, identity, and undoing

A common assumption in the literature regarding discourse and identity is that discourse analysis can be used to examine processes of identity construction (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004b). Whilst researchers vary with regard to how muscular discourse is in constructing an individual’s identity, some writers assume that language, talk, narrative, and/or interdiscursivity are integral to identity construction (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004b). Post-structuralist writers claim that “discourse ‘disciplines’ subjects in that actors are known – and know themselves – only within the confines of a particular discursive context (Mumby,

2001)” (Hardy & Phillips, 2004, p. 301). I propose altering this assumption by posing it as the following empirical question: what is the role of discourse in undoing identity? That is, if undoing is assumed to be primarily a linguistic phenomenon created and worked with in spoken and written interactions with others, what is the role of discourse in the process of undoing identities? In addition, is it possible to trace discourses that capture the myriad of ways in which undoing is created and experienced?

Performativity is a useful concept with which to explore the tightly coupled relationship between discourse and identity. Performativity is frequently linked to J.L. Austin’s (1962) classic *How to do Things with Words*, in which he argues that whilst there are some words that describe, there are others that actually do things. His now famous examples include the naming of a ship (“I name this ship the Stalin”) or wedding vows. Performativity is a relevant concept for this thesis as I am interested in how to undo identities with words, or how undoing becomes apparent through discourse. Judith Butler (1997) furthered the notion of performativity, linking it to Foucauldian notions of discourse. Butler argues that if discourses are seen as performative, they open spaces in which individuals can rework them. That is, participants may be able to reinterpret and shift identity discourses and undoing efforts. Adopting Butler’s post-structuralist reading of discourse enables organisations to be seen as sites of struggle between different forms of discourse, and therefore I am interested in exploring the diverse ways in which participants respond to discourses of undoing.

There is more to explaining phenomena than focusing solely on words though. In regard to a wedding, Kärreman and Alvesson (2008) argue that “to a certain extent words clearly are not enough . . . there is more to a wedding than words” (p. 322). This is an important reminder that whilst language may play a vital role, it “may not be the only ingredient” in the undoing of identity (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2008, p. 322). Indeed, it could also be that identity is constructed – or in this case undone – by the action of talking, not just what is said

(Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004b). That is, it could be the act of confessing, or the act of questioning another person, that is important in the process of undoing one's own or another's identity. I will now explore in more detail how discursive research can move beyond the level of talk.

Beyond language

All this talk of language, however, is not to say that action or embodied acts are excluded from discursive constructionist research. In her relationally responsive approach to social constructionism, Cunliffe (2008) draws attention to “ourselves as speaking embodied beings” (p. 130). That is, we “do not understand other people, or even objects, solely through acts of intellectual interpretation, but through sense impressions, gestures, emotional expressions and responses” (p. 131). This gives way to an intuitive and immanent form of knowing in which “we ‘feel’ our way around our relationships and interactions with others in a reflex, often pre-lingual way (Cunliffe, 2002a)” (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 134).

While leadership development seems to rely strongly on language, constructionist writers have drawn our attention to the material and embodied aspects involved in the development setting. Sinclair (2009) focuses on the body, gestures, gender, and costumes involved in development seminars. Ford and Harding (2008) look at the liminality of the training room. Carroll, Parker, and Inkson (2010) argue that emotions are in fact linguistic phenomena and discursive resources, and describe the leadership development setting as an “emotionalized zone” (Domagalski, 1999, as cited in Carroll et al., 2010, p. 1033). Furthermore, they argue that framing emotions as discursive resources means that they can be used to explore identity work and power: emotional work is part of identity construction, which is enacted within a context which makes certain emotions acceptable or unacceptable.

In the initial stages of my fieldwork, I paid attention to material and physical aspects (such as the layout of the seminar room, the towering physicality of the male participants etc.); however, given the social constructionist philosophy of the programme, I soon realised how central language was to this particular development experience – but also that there was more going on than talk. Following Carroll and colleagues (2010), emotional expressions and verbalisations also became an important form of data. There were emotional cues from participants that signalled the undoing of identity, such as silence, withdrawal, and crying. I also sometimes felt the impending tension, angst, and anxiety of undoing in situations. The argument could be made therefore that my attention to language, emotions, and gestures signals a mild multimodal approach rather than monomodal (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). It is mild as I am not looking at architecture or objects (i.e. food, clothing, etc.) as other multimodal researchers have (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Grant & Iedema, 2005).

The Limits of Social Constructionism

The choice of any research paradigm is not without its limitations and critiques. Critical realists such as Reed (2000) and Fairclough (2005), and positivists such as Donaldson (2003), have charged social constructionism with anti-realism, relativism, and offering unrealistically easy promises of social change. Some of these critiques arise from misunderstandings or miscommunications about the various forms of social constructionism. Some social constructionist researchers have responded to these critiques – even agreeing and proposing alterations (Czarniawska, 2003; Newton et al., 2011).

Perhaps one of the biggest intellectual struggles I have with social constructionism is the criticism that it denies the existence, influence, or constraints of material and institutional factors in organisational life. This is referred to as the “Furniture and Death” argument (see Czarniawska, 2003). I agree that there are “objects which are causally independent of human

beliefs and desires” (Rorty, 1991, as cited in Czarniawska, 2003, p. 131); however, our understandings of these are negotiated through social, cultural, and linguistic perceptions (Sandberg, 2001). I agree with Fairhurst and Grant (2010) that social constructionism does acknowledge these material factors, albeit by claiming they are “constructed through social processes in which meanings are negotiated, consensus formed, and contestation is possible” (p. 174). I see identity and leadership development as primarily intangible constructions, which are made visible through language, and therefore the anti-realism argument has less of an implication for this thesis.

Critics claim that social constructionists are unwilling to take a stand on phenomena such as the Holocaust, war, violence, and other forms of suffering (Czarniawska, 2003). This is a fair critique of some writers – particularly those adopting a post-modernist approach. However, Czarniawska (2003) argues that it is a misplaced exaggeration: incorrectly interpreting the agnosticism “most constructionists cheerfully admit” as “moral relativism” (p. 132). Social constructionist research informed by CMS is also criticised (by scholars from within this perspective) as it tends to “stop with critique” rather than going on to provide alternatives (Tourish & Barge, 2010, p. 336). Therefore, these researchers are challenged to be more “socially constructive” with their research (Grint & Jackson, 2010, p. 350). That is, rather than ending up in the “moral quagmire of relativity” (Grint & Jackson, 2010), they argue that these researchers should provide both a critique of the status quo and alternative schemas, discourses, processes, or purposes, in order to “make the world a better place” (pp. 349–50). The challenge for social constructionists becomes providing alternatives which are not “too easy” and which disregard material, institutional, or structural constraints by suggesting that all we need to do is change language (Czarniawska, 2003). This is a challenge I take up in the concluding chapters of this thesis.

Constructionist research that foregrounds the role of discourse has also attracted criticism from critical realist researchers (i.e. Fairclough, 2005; Reed, 2000). These critiques usually focus on extreme examples of constructionist/discursive research, particularly those with a strong Foucauldian orientation. These valuable critiques reminds us to be “more careful in one’s assumptions” because “the ways in which subjects relate to discourse may be Teflon-like; the language they are exposed to or use may not ‘stick’” (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b, p. 1132). Therefore, if undoing does occur, it may be partial, fleeting, and temporary. The effects of undoing may not be experienced in non-programme contexts. Newton’s (1998) articulate criticism of Foucault-inspired writing highlights the tendency for such writing to focus on how subjects are “done to” rather than “doing” (p. 428). Therefore, one should be cautious in claiming that individuals are solely undone by others (usually more powerful actors), and rather be attentive to occasions when an individual undoes themselves and others.

I also realise that not all experiences can be captured in discourse, or as Chia (2000) says, there are “areas of our pure experience which language and discourse are not able to reach” (p. 516). Communication about identity is “often indirect, suggestive, and symbolic rather than descriptive and precise” (p. 517). That is, I acknowledge that there may be aspects of undoing, or identity work more broadly, that are difficult to articulate due to the “incompetence of discourse or utterance” (p. 516). Even if they can be articulated, some participants may choose not to. Therefore, this thesis offers an account of the verbalised aspects of undoing.

Finally, researchers from within and outside a social constructionist paradigm identify the limitations of focusing on either micro- or macro-level phenomena (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a, 2000b; Reed, 2000; Sandberg, 2001). More specifically, as I am using a meso-discourse approach and researching one leadership development programme, I am building

knowledge based on a specific local context. Whilst this generates rich and detailed insights, it presents problems for saying something broader about leadership, organisations, and society. I also admit that my focus on interactions restricts my ability to explore how broader social and cultural conditions affect this context and the relations engendered within it (Reed, 2000; Sandberg, 2001). It also leads me to acknowledge that I am focusing on a single source of discourses (the development programme), rather than exploring the impact of discourses from beyond the development programme, such as the participant's workplace and other contexts (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004a).

These limitations serve as important reminders to be tentative regarding the claims and findings one makes, and to appreciate that there are other perspectives that may also offer different and viable interpretations. I am able to persevere knowing the limitations of my research paradigm as I realise that "no single theoretical or methodological account can provide a full understanding of organizing life" (Broadfoot, Deetz, & Anderson, 2004, p. 193). Therefore, my account of identity work in leadership development stands amongst many other interpretations, which may enlarge or contest my own.

In summary, this chapter positions social constructionism as the guiding epistemological paradigm for this thesis. This means that I am interested in exploring how identity work, and particularly undoing, is created and negotiated in a particular context, through linguistic interactions between people. I am attentive to the contradictions and tensions of these processes, as well as the (un)intended consequences that may arise. I see language as a primary means for constructing and experiencing identity work and undoing, not merely a reflection of its existence. I acknowledge that I am a part of the construction of knowledge regarding this phenomenon, and that my interpretation is but one story amongst many others. This chapter has also described a critically orientated version of social constructionism, one that is sensitive towards power, but without making it a primary focus. I frame power as a

relational process that can be both productive and debilitating, and able to be resisted or shifted. This means that I am interested in how dynamics of power operate in the process of undoing, amongst other questions. Finally, this chapter described the interpretation and role of discourse in this research. My interest here centres on the questions: what is the role of discourse in the process of undoing identities?; and, is it possible to trace discourses that capture the myriad of ways in which undoing is created and experienced? I now move on to explore how these constructionist assumptions have influenced my choices of research design, and the collection and analysis of empirical material.

CHAPTER 5

Research Design: Decisions, Reflections, and Implications

This chapter sets out the research design of this thesis, which is built primarily on the decision to carry out an ethnographic study of one 18-month leadership development programme. Ethnographic fieldwork has a “built in propensity” for constructionist research (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p. 1267), as ethnographies are more able to explore the “incoherence, variation, and fragmentation” of lived realities (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003, p. 378). Leadership development research seems to be lacking in longitudinal or ethnographic explorations (Gagnon, 2008, is a notable exception); therefore, this thesis represents one attempt to demonstrate what ethnographic fieldwork can contribute to leadership development knowledge. As I researched both face-to-face and virtual environments, this chapter describes the particular type of ethnographic design I use, a hybrid ethnography. I also spend time describing the research context, and my role as a researcher. I then move on to explain the various data collection techniques, as well as my approach to discourse analysis. Ethical considerations and limitations of this design are also outlined.

A Hybrid Ethnography: Researching Traditional and Virtual Communities

Whilst much contestation exists surrounding the use of the term ethnography, Agar (1996) has outlined some distinguishing elements of ethnographic research. I will use these elements to justify my claim that I undertook an ethnography, yet I admit it is not a traditional ethnography where I went to an exotic land armed with a notebook and safari suit. Rather, as I observed both face-to-face interactions and virtual interactions, my research setting is what Ruhleder (2000) calls a “hybrid environment”, where “the physical and virtual overlap and intersect” (p. 4). The notion of a virtual ethnography is established in academic literature; therefore, altering Ruhleder’s term, I propose that I performed a hybrid ethnography, which

brings together traditional (i.e. physical settings) and virtual forms of ethnography. In this section, I first cover the traditional ethnographic theory, then elaborate upon virtual ethnography.

A common definition of ethnography is given by Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) who describe it as a researcher participating in and/or observing a specific setting for an extended period of time, using various methods to collect different forms of data. Ethnography refers not only to the method of research, but also to the written outcome (Alvesson, 2003; Rosen, 1991; Tedlock, 2000; Van Maanen, 1988). Agar (1996) argues that an ethnography involves a commitment from the researcher to spend a large amount of time in the field, where the researcher has direct personal involvement with the research context. The field is generally framed as a physical (non-virtual) setting, or in my case, the face-to-face residential workshops. While ethnography scholars differ regarding the necessary length of involvement, Agar suggests one to two years as the traditional period. The 18-month duration of my fieldwork falls within this timeframe. The extended time period means I was able to observe the rhythm of the leadership development experience: the peaks and troughs, stops and starts, bursts and lulls, in ways that a cross-sectional, interview-only design would not have captured as fully.

Traditionally, being in the field means that the researcher will leave their comfortable setting and go “into the groups’ home turf to do the research” (Agar, 1996, p. 120). I travelled to four different locations across New Zealand with the cohort to observe their residential workshops. The workshops ranged from two to five days in duration, and were held at a variety of venues such as high school grounds, university buildings, conference centres, rural retreat centres, and an outdoor education centre. Participants shared their sleeping spaces, and eating was a communal experience. At the outdoor education centre, the participants did not have access to cell phones or internet. I have therefore left the comfortable confines of my

own setting. However, “home turf” is not an entirely accurate descriptor for these residential workshops as they are a different setting to the participant’s and facilitator’s workplaces, although the facilitators are probably the most used to this setting. They are therefore a liminal space, betwixt and between organisations (Ford & Harding, 2008), which implies it is a sacred and special place for the cohort which is more theirs than mine. One could argue, however, that this setting – a facilitation/learning environment – is not all that unfamiliar for a researcher who teaches at a higher education learning institution. This is reflective of a broader shift in organisational ethnography as researchers do not usually travel to exotic lands but research more familiar contexts and individuals instead (Alvesson, 2003).

Another distinguishing feature of ethnographic research is the researcher-participant relationship (Agar, 1996). Metaphors such as student/teacher or child/parent are used to describe the asymmetrical relationship that exists and shifts between researcher and participants. At the beginning of the fieldwork, the researcher is usually in the “one-down” position where they are the student or child as they are new to the setting and therefore in a learning role, which involves making mistakes, listening, observing, and looking for guidance and evaluation regarding their performance. My field notes certainly reflect this uncertainty about how I should/should not act, my sensitivity to perceptions of me, and the time I spent listening and learning the language. This relationship altered over the duration of the fieldwork as we all became more comfortable and knowledgeable. However, I was by no means the only learner in the room; the participants (and facilitators to a certain extent) also firmly experience this role.

Lastly, holding an inductive or abductive approach to research (rather than deductive) is a differentiating feature of ethnographic research (Agar, 1996). Ethnographers, Agar argues, do not formulate hypotheses before entering the field with the intention of testing them in the fieldwork. The metaphor of the researcher as learner means that their questions, interests, and

understandings arise from the research setting and group. Amongst the various interpretations of inductive and abductive research, Alvesson and Kärreman's (2007) idea of constructing mysteries has influenced my approach. Following this method, the researcher does not enter the field *tabula rasa*; rather, they are aware of their interpretive repertoire comprising their "paradigmatic, political, theoretical, methodological, and social predispositions" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p. 1269). Rather than testing a hypothesis, the researcher notices breakdowns between their expectations and preconceptions, and occurrences in the field. These breakdowns are then built into a mystery not explained by current theory, which the researcher seeks to resolve (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

I wish to accentuate the ethnographic design of my research and stress that I am not using a case study methodology. Although there is confusing cross-over between the terms, one does not presuppose the other. That is, case study research does not dictate using ethnographic data collection techniques (it may even involve using quantitative methods), nor does an ethnography lead to the production of a case study (Yin, 1981). Indeed, case study method can be built on epistemological and ontological assumptions incongruent with those ethnography holds, and particularly with social constructionism. For example, Kathleen Eisenhardt's (1989) popular case method holds a positivist view of research, and therefore aspires to meet such criteria as replicability, generalisability, and objectivity. So, whilst it can be described as inductive, her method has many of the attributes of hypothesis-testing research (Dyer Jr & Wilkins, 1991), which as described in the previous paragraph, differs significantly from my abductive approach. I now turn to the virtual element of my ethnographic methodology.

Virtual ethnography

Virtual ethnography is the term used to describe research that involves “becoming immersed in virtual culture and observing interactive websites and virtual communities” (Browne, 2003, p. 249). It entails the application of ethnographic practices such as a long-term commitment to watching, listening, and participating (to some extent) in order to understand aspects of social life in a particular online setting (Hine, 2008). It is assumed that virtual dialogue and activity between people are forms of social interaction, with sets of meanings, practices, and dynamics worthy of study (Hine, 2000).

Christine Hine, a prominent figure in virtual ethnography literature, gives an overview of the field and pinpoints the 1990s as the time when researchers became interested in the social formations which were being formed in cyberspace (Hine, 2008). Early research looked at text-based bulletin boards, such as those for soap opera fans, and the rich interpersonal dynamics that arose when people came together online to discuss topics of interest (Hine, 2008). Since then, the invention and uptake of multi-player online games such as World of Warcraft, graphical life-simulation worlds such as Second Life, and social networking sites such as Facebook and Myspace provide popular sites for ethnographic inquiry. It is these new forms of “immersive environments” which are “insert[ing] themselves ever more insidiously into all aspects of daily life” that are inspiring more virtual ethnographies (Hine, 2008, p. 268).

Incorporating virtual ethnographic work has the potential to provide different ways of understanding identity work in leadership development than face-to-face ethnographies. A field of scholarship exists around the construction of identity on online web-based platforms such as chat rooms, instant messaging, blogs, and so on. While a large amount of this research has concentrated on teen/adolescent users (Arsand, 2008; Hodkinson & Lincoln,

2008), other research has looked at professional groups, such as stock market investment communities (Campbell, Fletcher, & Greenhill, 2009). This research argues that considerable identity work is carried out online, in ways that are significantly different to offline identity work. Such research looks at the “construction”, “management” (Suler, 2002), “performance” (Arsand, 2008), or “emergence” (Waskul & Douglass, 1997) of identity via online interactions and confessions. Campbell and colleagues (2009) argue that individuals engage in “identity shape shifting” (p. 461) more easily online as they can experiment with different identities and ways of being. If we take this as an empirical question rather than fact, online data could be useful for exploring the claim by constructionist researchers that identities are multiple.

It seems that virtual research methods may increasingly be needed to understand the future forms of leadership development. The Centre for Creative Leadership recently started an online leadership development programme run through Second Life, a three-dimensional virtual world. Individuals use avatars (3-D representations of themselves) to interact with other participants, receive one-on-one feedback from facilitators, and complete assessments and experiential exercises – all without leaving their home or office. If this is the future of leadership development, virtual ethnography represents a vital form of research.

In terms of my research, the bulk of learning and interaction in the leadership development programme was carried out via an online learning environment. This online system is designed by a company called Moodle (www.moodle.co.nz) and is used specifically by educational and training organisations. This site is a central information and interaction hub for the programme participants and facilitators. Each user constructed a profile of themselves with a photo and introductory blurb. Users could post entries to the whole group, their sub-group, the facilitation team, and to a semi-private confessional forum, “Ispace”, which only

the facilitators and I could access. The website is also a repository of the participants' written assignments.

The programme tried to establish this online platform as a vital aspect of the participants' daily life. They were expected to log in and contribute on a regular basis. At times, some participants and facilitators were interacting on a daily basis online. Conversations held between the sub-groups offline were expected to be summarised online in the form of meeting agendas, transcriptions, or verbatim copies of online instant chats held on Skype or similar forums. In the third intersession (between residential 3 and 4), if participants were not active on this website they risked receiving a warning letter and being thrown out of the programme, hence showing how serious the online component is in the development process. Facilitators were able to download activity reports to monitor the level of contribution of each participant. To focus on only one of the settings – the online forum or residential workshops – would result in a partial and limited understanding of the leadership development experience. I will discuss the online setting in more detail in the upcoming Collecting Empirical Material section.

Like face-to-face ethnographies, virtual ethnographers have to negotiate certain peculiarities (Ruhleder, 2000). First of all, my level of participation online was negotiated. The majority of the time I was a complete observer, watching and reading the interactions and postings. However, participants were aware of my presence on the site, as an icon with my name would show that I was online. I wrote one post introducing my research, and therefore I had the experience of feeling what it is like to write a post, submit it, and wait for a response (in my case, there was not any). I appear to have been accepted in my role as an observer as I never received any questioning about my presence, despite inviting participants in my posting to do so if they wished.

Some critics have challenged the authenticity of what people say and do online, and therefore the claims which researchers make based on this research (Hine, 2008). Hine (2008) responds to such criticisms by challenging the underlying assumption that face-to-face interactions are seen as the standard for real and truthful interaction – despite the fact that people can be misleading and deceitful in face-to-face interviews and observations as well. It may be more problematic for my research participants to be fraudulent or dishonest as they have relationships offline. Indeed, some participants have commented that they are more honest online than in some of their offline contexts.

My use of offline and online is a binary which has also recently been challenged by virtual ethnographers. They contend that the virtual and the real are not separate environments; rather, the two overlap and interact with each other (Hine, 2008). The way in which participants interact on Moodle is influenced (and perhaps constrained) by interactions they have at residential workshops. Such writers call for research focused on “threads of meaning-making that cross the online/offline divide” (Hine, 2008, p. 266), hence encouraging virtual researchers to also explore the offline worlds which their virtual participants inhabit. Therefore, part of my data analysis involves contrasting online talk with face-to-face observations of participants.

I am aware that there will be other online activity and interactions I am not able to access, such as emails and private messages, but this applies to face-to-face ethnographies as well (i.e. the hushed conversations late at night in hotel rooms etc.). I therefore accept it as one of the realities of ethnographic work, and have had to let go of my wishful (but unrealistic) desire to know everything.

The Research Context: Provider, Programme, and Participants

Focusing on one research unit, be it a community, an organisation, a group, or even an individual, is established in ethnography tradition and history (Alvesson, 1996; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). I focused on one leadership development provider and one of their flagship programmes. The decision to choose one research site is not without limitation; however, identity and constructionist researchers from organisation studies have set a clear precedent for this design (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2008). Such researchers argue that it enables the researcher to provide intensive and detailed explorations of identity processes whilst paying close attention and sensitivity to a specific context – which reinforces the meso-discourse approach I am using. I concentrated on one cohort, resulting in a more holistic perspective of the development experience for a given cohort (Agar, 1996).

There are examples of qualitative leadership development research that investigate two or more programmes or providers (i.e. Gagnon, 2008; A. Jones, 2005; Sinclair, 2009), and others that look at one (i.e. Carroll & Levy, 2010; Ford & Harding, 2008). Therefore, it seems acceptable to focus on one programme and provider in order to study processes of identity work. Furthermore, my research investigates a group of leaders who tend to be ignored in leadership development literature: young adult (20–30-year-old), early-career leaders. This runs counter to the dominant focus on middle managers or senior executives, and differs from the smaller group of research on youth (teenage) leaders. Therefore, this thesis sheds light on a different cohort of leaders who are generally under-represented in the literature. I will now elaborate upon the provider, programme, and participants.

The leadership development provider: The Atlas Institute

I carried out my research at a leadership development and research institute (The Atlas Institute) based in New Zealand. This organisation was launched in 2004 and is partnered with a university, numerous trusts, and private corporations.

According to organisational documents, the Atlas Institute's purpose is to enhance both the understanding of leadership and to develop leaders who will advance organisations, communities, and therefore New Zealand. They believe that the development of high-quality leadership in both communities and organisations can bridge the performance gap between New Zealand's aspirations and achievements. As well as running a variety of leadership development programmes, the Atlas Institute also has a research function. This function is primarily carried out by a small team of in-house researchers (many of whom are also involved in development), and extends to connections with external researchers based at both local and overseas universities.

Three main types of development programmes are run by Atlas: 2-day short courses introducing participants to leadership concepts; 2–6-month programmes focusing on key leadership capacities; and 12–18-month programmes aiming to develop sustainable and integrated leadership learning. Atlas provides both “in-house” programmes for specific organisations, and “open” programmes which select individuals from across sectors, organisations, industries, and geographical regions. I researched an 18 month ‘open’ programme. Whilst Atlas is affiliated with a university, no degrees or certificates are awarded for completion.

In recent years, Atlas has solidified their particular approach to leadership development. According to their publicly available documents, their leadership development philosophy is focused on building individual and collective capacity to see new opportunities, possibilities,

and potential. They claim that participants on their 12–18-month programmes will develop: their own sense of leadership based on their experiences and contexts; the ability to expand their leadership “spheres” and have greater impact across organisational, community, and private domains; the capacity to combine reflection with action in order to learn from daily experiences in an ongoing and sustained way; and to develop a network of peers to learn with.

There are some allusions to notions of undoing in their public documents. The capacity-building which Atlas aims to achieve involves developing different ways of being aware of their world and who they are in that world. This involves “unlearning” and the “releasing” of the self-imposed boundaries that have been holding them back.

Atlas consciously uses social constructionism to inform their conceptualisation of leadership and its development (i.e. Cunliffe, 2008; Grint, 2005), and as such they draw explicitly on theories such as leadership-as-practice (Carroll et al., 2008), adaptive leadership (particularly the work of Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), sense-making (Weick, 1995, 1996), discourse, and identity (Cunliffe, 2009; Sinclair, 2007). The research and development programmes undertaken by Atlas therefore assume that leadership and its development is relational, contextual, negotiated, and ambiguous.

The Catalyst Programme

Of the various programmes the Atlas Institute offers, I selected the emerging leader programme (Catalyst Programme) for pragmatic reasons (the timing fitted with my thesis timeline), and for strategic purposes (historically, Atlas has found this group more comfortable with articulating vulnerabilities, doubts, concerns, and identity-related issues). The participants are usually between 20 and 30 years old, and entering leadership roles in their work or other areas of life. According to organisational documents, this programme

requires participants to find their own leadership identity and to question and debate what they believe to be true about leadership, in order to broaden and disrupt their ideas about leadership. Atlas justifies the need for a programme for emerging leaders as they are the key to New Zealand's future success; however, they are not given the support required to make this impact.

Atlas uses several key elements for leadership learning on this programme: face-to-face workshops, online learning, leadership projects and experiments, peer group learning (called "cluster groups"), reflective writing, and practitioner- and academic-orientated readings. These elements reflect their commitment to providing a mix of theoretical and experiential learning related to the individual's lived, everyday reality. Across the 18 months, the participants attended five residential workshops, which ranged from two to five days long. An intersession period connects the time between each workshop, and ranged from two to six months long. During this time, participants engaged in a series of individual and cluster activities, which required them to interact with non-programme individuals at times. The participants were instructed to be in regular contact with each other via the online platform. Appendix A represents my summary of the programme, using documents from Atlas (i.e. PowerPoint slides from residential; detailed residential itineraries), announcements made online to participants about the intersessions, and my observations of residential. I use verbatim words from the documents as much as possible. The list of required readings is given in Appendix B, which indicates the approach and content of the programme.

The trajectory of the programme is loosely divided into four main stages, moving from "exploring leadership worlds", to "leadership in relationship", "shaping leadership space", and finally "being in leadership". Within these phases, participants are taught concepts such as "killer questioning" (an engaged and intensive form of questioning), storytelling, sense-

making, interrogating assumptions and boundaries, reframing thinking, and identity work (this is language used by the programme provider, not my summation).

It is necessary to describe the approach to identity and identity work that the programme offers, as it differs from conventional leadership development programmes. At the first, third, and fourth residentials, the facilitators presented this concept of identity work, drawing explicitly on social constructionist thinking. At the first residential, identity work was introduced as a vital leadership practice. One facilitator told the group: “this programme gives you more selves, more to choose from. We’re asking you to pay attention to who you call into existence at moments.” Using the work of Ann Cunliffe (2009) and George Herbert Mead (1934), participants were invited to see themselves as a “parliament of selves”, in other words, as containing a whole host of different and potentially contradictory identities that can be “animated” and “foregrounded”. The facilitators define identity as “the answer given to the question ‘who am I/who am I being’ in any given moment”. Change as a leader is about “getting new identities to add to the repertoire”, in order to “create space”, “do a different thing”, and to “change others”. As one facilitator summarises, “if you can carry multiple identities, you have multiple options”, and “leadership work is calling in other identities for who you’re with”. Identity work therefore is an intentional, conscious, and verbalised process that can occur in daily interactions between people. There is an assumption that corporate organisations “give rules about what identities you can bring” to work; however, identity work can open up “infinite space”.

A number of identity techniques were introduced. For example, prior to an important interaction or scenario, the participants were encouraged to address the question “Who are you going to be?”, and to communicate this with their group members. Participants were encouraged to experiment with who they are being in the development programme. Facilitators sometimes pointedly questioned participants about who they were being in

certain interactions, and invited participants to experiment with different identities. Drawing on the work of Karl Weick (1996), the programme also encouraged participants to consider what identities they hold that may need to be dropped, or held “more lightly”.

Participants

Thirty participants began and finished the programme (17 males and 13 females). The youngest member was 22 when the programme started, and the oldest was 30. The participants were sponsored by a variety of trusts, corporations, and community organisations. As this was an “open” programme, participants came from a variety of sectors such as: education, sports, engineering/architecture/design, medicine and health, banking and finance, defence, local government, agribusiness, and business/commerce. Participants were also demonstrating leadership in community/volunteer activities and some played representative-level sport. Regions across New Zealand were represented on the programme, with participants hailing from Dunedin in the south, to Auckland in the north, and many regions in between. The 30 participants were divided into eight smaller “cluster” groups. These groups became the main source of interaction online, and the groups had to construct and discuss leadership experiments with each other.

Facilitators

There were four primary facilitators on the programme, and two periphery facilitators. The four main facilitators were involved in the programme design and delivery of content at residential workshops. They were assigned to one to two cluster groups each to facilitate for the duration of the programme. The two periphery facilitators attended some of the residential workshops to interact with their clusters (they were assigned one cluster group each) but did not deliver content. In total, there were four females and two males (one of which was a periphery facilitator). These facilitators have experience in outdoor education, family therapy,

secondary school teaching, company directorships, and organisational development/consulting, and hold a series of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications (from Bachelor degrees to PhDs). Some are, or have been, active researchers and university lecturers. Two of the facilitators are employed in full-time/part-time roles in other organisations and are therefore contractors or associates to Atlas, whereas the other four facilitators are full-time employees of Atlas. Having summarised the research context, I now move on to discuss my role in it.

My Role as Researcher

The ethnographer's personal involvement in the fieldwork setting raises important questions regarding their role in the field. The researcher is described as the main research instrument in ethnographic work (Reeves Sanday, 1979). Several writers have offered continuums along which researchers can peg their role, usually basing it on their level of participation in the research setting. Raymond Gold (1958) offers an oft-cited set of roles for ethnographic researchers ranging from complete participant to complete observer. The observer-as-participant role describes the role I eventually settled on for my face-to-face fieldwork. The group clearly knew my presence was as a researcher – not a facilitator or fellow participant. At times, I was able to interact with the participants (and therefore was not a “complete observer”), but I did not cross over into the role of friend, co-participant, or facilitator (as a complete participant or participant-as-observer would). In terms of my online observation, I was a complete observer, as except from one post in which I introduced myself as a researcher, I did not contribute to any other posts.

However, Gold's typology conceals the messiness of being a researcher: across the 18 months, my role shifted. At the first residential I participated more – joining in on group activities, participating in some discussions – and therefore could be seen as a participant-as-

observer. The participants were quite curious about who I was and my research interests. After this first residential, I attended a meeting with three of the facilitators in order to “share our experience of bringing Helen as [a] researcher into a residential/programme space” (as described by a facilitator). This meeting was primarily led by one facilitator who requested that I “just observe” rather than participate as they did not want the participants becoming confused with my role (i.e. they might see me as a fellow participant or a facilitator). I was asked not to disclose my thesis topic to the participants, instigate research-related conversations, or to talk in one-on-one scenarios with participants or facilitators. The facilitator expressed concern that the presence of a researcher may jeopardise the development process for some of the participants, and therefore my impact on the environment needed to be mitigated. They requested that I did not include the facilitators in my research. This meeting was later described by one facilitator as “[you] being inducted into how we do things . . . [which] can mean throwing out lots of unsettling, disquieting stuff into visibility”. I did indeed find this meeting quite anxiety-inducing for me as a junior researcher, which led me to experiment with my role in the next residential.

Therefore, at my second residential, which was at an outdoor pursuits/education centre, I reduced my level of participation. Due to the action-based nature of this workshop, I participated in such activities as the bush walk, runs, jumping into the freezing ocean, etc. However, I observed rather than participated in group activities that presented development opportunities for the group such as raft-building, sailing, group debriefing sessions and so on. I was drawn into group conversations with participants regarding leadership and their experiences of the programme thus far. In the third residential, my level of participation dropped to virtually zero; I was basically a “complete observer”, a fly on the wall. I did not instigate research-related conversation with the participants, and except for one activity, I did not participate in the group activities. At times I deliberately sat away from the group – i.e.

outside of the circle. While this role is the one the facilitators preferred, my concern with this elusive role is that I became too distanced from the group and could not capture the informal conversations surrounding interactions I observed. Therefore, by the fourth and fifth residential, I felt more comfortable being an ‘observer-as-participant’, and interacting with the participants up to a certain point. I perceived that the facilitators were more comfortable with my presence at this stage in the programme as it was nearing the end of the development process.

My experience therefore disagrees with some of the literature which assumes that researchers choose their role. Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2000) use the terms role making and role taking to describe how researchers “adopt” their roles. However, as described in the previous paragraph, I did not feel unbridled agency to construct my role. Rather, who I was in the field was shaped by the conflicting expectations from the Atlas Institute (“just observe”), the participants (drawing me into conversation), and myself (wanting to collect as much data as possible – both “frontstage” and “backstage”). The variation in my roles can be read as my attempts to balance these different expectations of identity as a researcher, and whilst I tried to be as intentional and reflective as possible, there were lasting effects on my behaviour from that meeting with the facilitators.

Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) set out two other criteria about the researcher’s role. The first concerns how much the participants know about the research. Prior to the beginning of the programme, the facilitators were aware of my intention to explore identity work in leadership development and the role of facilitators in this process. It is perhaps partly due to this awareness that the facilitators were cautious of my potential impact on facilitators and participants, and felt a need to protect them. From the beginning of my fieldwork, I was deliberately broad with the participants about my research interests, explaining that I was interested in the nature of the leadership development journey. As I became more interested

in identity, I would elaborate further and say that I was interested in the identity work of participants and facilitators (I was able to use this term “identity work” as the participants had learnt it on the programme). Only one participant had a brief idea of the “undoing” focus due to their involvement with a university-based research group we both attend. Only two of the facilitators eventually knew about the specific focus of my thesis.

The other criteria from Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) is how completely the researcher consciously adopts the role of insider or outsider. They allude to some researchers who have intentionally become an insider, or “gone native”. I have always been clear with myself and the research participants that my purpose was not to undertake or facilitate leadership development on the Catalyst Programme. One of the concerns of being a complete observer is that at times one can find the culture “bizarre” and “experience difficulties in taking it seriously” (Hine, 2008, p. 262). Such feelings impel a researcher to “do careful work on their assumptions” (p. 262). However, I do not see bizarre/serious as a tension. Following Alvesson and Kärreman (2007), I intentionally reminded myself that leadership development is bizarre in order to resist falling into taken-for-granted ways of thinking. This does not mean that I see the context as trivial or comical though: indeed, if a researcher finds something bizarre it should be taken absolutely seriously in order to make a valuable empirical observation (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). The bigger problem with being a complete observer is that it can make the analyst more able to critique their research participants in quite unfair and destructive ways, as they may find it difficult to empathise with the participants. At times the process of keeping up with the identity work of 30 participants was fatiguing and saturating. The confessional nature of the online environment meant that some participants made some elitist and dogmatic statements, which I found difficult to process. My supervisors were helpful in noticing this frustrated voice and suggesting alternative interpretations and ways of working with this fatigue.

As I have felt the triumphs and troubles of doing fieldwork and doctoral research, I have come to realise that I, like the participants and facilitators, have experienced moments of undoing. I am by no means an exception: ethnographic work pulls researchers in ways that can boost or threaten their identities. Peggy Reeves Sanday (1979) beautifully captures it in the quote “the ethnographer who becomes immersed in other people’s realities is never quite the same afterward” (p. 527). While this research project is an intellectual pursuit first and foremost, at times who I am as a researcher has felt shaken and upset. I have had to let go of certain preconceptions and ways of acting, and I have opened up to different ways of doing research. This research project is identity constitutive to the extent that it has enabled me to locate and speak to a research community that I wish to belong to. However, it has not been a “means of self-discovery and creative self-authorship” (Humphreys, Brown, & Hatch, 2003, p. 7), which some writers believe ethnographic research should be or is.

This section has explored the hybrid ethnography I am doing, one that traverses face-to-face and virtual development worlds. I have described the research context and their programme’s particular approach to leadership development and identity. I have positioned my role as a researcher, and acknowledged how my identity as a researcher has not been left unchanged by this experience. I now move on to outline the various forms of empirical material I have captured.

Collecting Empirical Material⁶

As described earlier, my research is centred on interspersed face-to-face observation (i.e. attendance at residential workshops, and a facilitator planning meeting) and continuous observation of online interactions. I also collected reflective assignments written by

⁶ Drawing on Alvesson & Kärreman (2007), I use the term “empirical material” as the “metaphorical quality of ‘material’ indicates that we, as researchers, must actively do something with it” (p. 1267). The constructed nature of crafting empirical material is often misleadingly disguised in the term “data collection”, which implies that data lie in wait for the researcher to capture. Therefore, whenever I use the term data or collection I am using it in same way as empirical material construction.

participants, as well as documents produced by the programme provider. Table 2 summarises the different sources of data. In this section, I will discuss the details of each source and the purpose it fulfils.

Table 2.

Overview of Different Types of Data Collection Sources

Face-to-face Observation
Residential Workshops (x 5)
Workshop planning meeting (x 1)
Online Observation
Whole group discussion forums
Cluster group discussion forums
Semi-private reflection space (“Ispace”)
Document Analysis
Personal documents (participants’ assignments)
Organisational documents (Atlas Institute/Caralyst Programme documents)

Face-to-face observation

Observation entails the systematic and explicit recording of information gained through observing (and in some cases, participating in) a selected research setting (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). I observed 15 days of face-to-face interaction between participants and facilitators at the interspersed residential workshops throughout the 18-month period of the programme. As previously described, the bulk of my practice is non-participant observation. Please see Appendix A for a breakdown of the date, location, and purpose of each residential.

The obviousness of my role as a researcher meant I always had a notebook and pen ready to instantly record the data. This resulted in over 250 pages of field notes. Generally, my ability to take good field notes improved as I spent more time in the field. Aided by Dewalt and Dewalt’s (2002) suggestions, I recorded such observations as: the arrangement of the

physical space (i.e. sitting in a circle etc.), the arrangement of people in this space (i.e. where the facilitators were sitting), verbatim words spoken in interactions between people (including with me), non-verbal expressions, and those who spoke and those who were silent. I would count ratios of males to females in group activities, and note who dominated conversation. At the end of each day, I revisited my field notes, adding more detail to them if necessary. I also kept a separate research diary in which I recorded my own intuitions, emotions, perceptions, confusions, curiosities, and frustrations. I also accessed video and audio recordings of small group activities as well as photographs of documents the participants produced during the residential. These recordings were made by the facilitation team (not by me). Table 3 itemises the different forms of recorded material.

Table 3.

Overview of Different Types of Recorded Data

Residential Workshop	Audio	Video	Photographic
1	---	---	Pictures about participants' understanding of leadership and the development process so far
2	---	---	---
3	---	Cluster presentations about their leadership edge	---
4	a. Personal stories told by each person about what their passion and love is in relation to their leadership challenge b. Cluster conversation debriefing/sense-making regarding the group dynamics of previous intersession	---	Pictures reflecting an aspect of love story told by participant
5	---	---	---

Observation provides a different lens with which to explore lived-experiences, rather than solely relying on the interview (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). The critical reflexivity of the researcher becomes increasingly important as they actively construct interpretations and meanings of the observed events (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The residentials I attended and observed were like peaks in my data collection process – much like how the participants experience them in their development. They provided me with an intuition of my site and subjects. They were chances for me to reconnect with the people behind the screeds and screeds of online postings. The residentials also highlighted different people, and different identities of people than who they were online: the prolific online writers were quieter in the large group setting; whilst the ghosts of Moodle were more vocal. It was also a more uncomfortable experience for me as my physical presence was made visible; I was not hiding behind a computer screen reading their interactions. There was more impression management and identity work for me in the residential environment, which made it an exhausting experience.

Online observation

Another important source of observation is the virtual interactions that occur between participants and facilitators via the website previously described. The discussions generally covered leadership-related topics or reflections on the leadership development journey. They ranged from heated debates to warm and fuzzy postings of support for each other. Some groups discussed quite personal and sensitive matters (such as childhood trauma, troubles with family, friends, partners, and so on). The semi-private confessional postings to “Ispace” revealed quite personal thoughts and feelings (usually identity-related) – but with the awareness that someone “out there” is watching and reading (only rarely did the facilitators respond to the posts).

The amount of online discussion has been overwhelmingly profuse. In total over 6600 posts were made by the participants and facilitators during the 18 months. I read each of these posts – even the mundane and irrelevant ones (i.e. posts organising to meet socially). For the first six months of the programme, I printed out every post, enough to fill three foolscap folders. However, as I refined my focus, I printed only the relevant posts, but continued to read every post. The huge amount of online postings is perhaps symptomatic of the age group of this cohort (20–30-year-olds) who are arguably more adept at and comfortable with engaging online, perhaps due to their familiarity with other social networking mediums such as Facebook, Skype, twitter and so on. Perhaps it also reflects the yearning from some members of this group to engage in stimulating conversation, which they are not finding in other forums – both online and offline. In saying this, many participants begrudged having to interact online for various reasons such as not having the time or energy to contribute, feeling overwhelmed by the number of posts, struggling to articulate what they wanted to say, fearing being seen as less intelligent than others, and so on.

Occasionally, the topic of online conversations centred on interactions or events that occurred at residential workshops – events which I observed. Therefore, these online discussions provide clues about how an individual interpreted the event. I am also able to compare them with my face-to-face observations in order to explore possible contradictions. Some of the postings are extended articulations of reflective confessions, often reaching thousands of words in length, which provide detailed and specific insight into the participant's thinking. The postings and interactions are recorded and stored online; they are not my recollections or memories of interactions.

Document analysis

The personal and organisational documents I accessed comprise a different source of data. Neither of these forms of documents – personal or organisational – were produced on my request; rather, they have been written for development purposes. Table 4 below represents the details and purpose of each document. In the case of personal documents, participants were required to write individual reflections at different stages of the development period, numbering over 400 pages in total. I group documents written by Atlas staff about their organisation and their programmes as organisational documents.

Table 4.

Overview of Different Types of Documents Collected

Personal (Participants)	Organisational (Atlas Institute)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Programme application forms• Pre-programme assignment• Development snapshots: two assignments completed at half-way point and at end of programme• Travel Plan• Travel Logs (3 logs per person)• Anonymous evaluations of residential workshop (completed for all 5 residential)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website and marketing material• PowerPoint slides used at residential• Detailed itineraries for each residential workshop• Assignment briefs given to participants• Information announcements to participants

Some of the personal documents written by participants provided sustained talk and narratives about identity and identity work. In some cases, the written document refers to interactions or events which I observed and therefore provides an account of how this participant is making sense of that instance. There is also a level of candidness about these

reflections. The organisational documents were used to trace the identity discourses promoted by the programme, as well as to provide information regarding the overall philosophy and purpose of the organisation and the programme.

Following a social constructionist perspective, I assume that I am an active reader of these documents, co-constructing the meanings and interpretations which I claim they have (Bryman & Bell, 2003). I attempt to understand the perspective of the author, and interpret each text with a sensitivity to the context in which it was produced. My ethnographic observations enable me to have a greater understanding of this context and the author, and therefore I draw on these ethnographic understandings in my analysis of these documents (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Ethical Considerations

A number of ethical protocols have been followed in the process of conducting this research. Appendices C to F contain full details of the information sheets and consent forms given to the participants regarding a number of ethical measures guiding this research. I will concentrate here on the two most important ones, informed consent and confidentiality.

The research participants were given information sheets detailing the purpose of the research and their requested involvement in it (see Appendices C and D). I also spoke to the group on several occasions regarding this information. Individuals had the chance to ask questions both online and offline, publicly or privately. They also had the right to decline to answer any questions, to withdraw from the research, and to choose not to be recorded by any device. The programme participants understood that their involvement in (or withdrawal from) the research would not affect their status on the programme in any way. Participants and facilitators signed an informed consent form (see Appendix E), indicating their agreement to the research conditions. Consent was also gained from the CEO of the Atlas Institute (see

Appendix F). One of the main conditions of this consent was that the involvement of facilitators in the research (or their withdrawal from it) was voluntary and would not affect their employment status.

The research participants were also informed about my measures to treat the material confidentially. This protocol centres on mitigating the likelihood of participants being identified. To this end, pseudonyms are used to disguise the identities of both facilitators and participants, as well as the organisation. No introductions or backgrounds to the participants are given. Whilst this information may have provided the reader with greater contextual understanding of a participant, I have chosen to forego this benefit in the interests of protecting the participant. The data I present in this thesis come from interactions where obviously more than one person was present, and where I was not the only audience. Therefore, it may be possible for the participants and/or facilitators to recognise certain data I present (and potentially the individuals involved), seeing as they were present either vocally or not in the interaction. However, I am confident that individuals not involved in the programme would not be able to identify particular identities.

It is important for me to disclose that one of the facilitators on the Catalyst Programme is also my secondary thesis supervisor. My primary supervisor was not a research participant, and therefore this person was able to bring an outsider lens to the research, and provide advice about how to negotiate the supervisor/participant dynamic. My secondary thesis supervisor and I had to put some “boundaries” (to use the language of the programme) around our interactions during residential workshops. That is, it was agreed between myself and all the facilitators (including my supervisor) that my supervisor and I would not discuss my research at the residential workshops. This was to help the facilitator/supervisor stay as focused as possible in their role as a facilitator at the workshops. The facilitators and programme participants were aware of this relationship.

In many ways, having a supervisor who was involved in the research setting has improved my ability as a researcher. That is, during my analysis of the material, I looked for the various interpretations of a given interaction, tempering the urge to jump to harsh criticisms, and instead being more tentative and nuanced in my claims. My supervisor's background in critical organisation theory also meant that I was encouraged to critique the data more if I was becoming too tentative. I also consulted with other academics outside of my supervisory team (and outside of New Zealand), in order to gain different perspectives about my research. This overlap of supervisor and research participant has therefore influenced the writing of this thesis, but this fits with the constructionist assumption that knowledge is co-constructed between people. It is difficult to know how this thesis may have been different if both supervisors were not research participants; however, I am satisfied that in my case having a supervisor who is also a research participant has not adversely constrained or shaped the end product.

Unit of Analysis

My data analysis primarily focuses on interactions between participants and/or facilitators. While identity research tends to focus on self-narratives rather than in situ interactions (Down & Reveley, 2009), some researchers have established interactions as a valuable unit of analysis for identity research (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001), and for leadership studies (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010; Larsson & Lundholm, 2010).

My focus on interactions corresponds with a social constructionist commitment, as I attempt to trace how undoing occurs in moments between people – or as Butler (2004) argues, how we are “undone by each other” (p. 19). This reflects my broader assumption that leadership, leadership development, and identity are accomplished in a series of social interactions, practices, and processes (Crevani et al., 2010). Down and Reveley (2009) use interactions to

explore how individuals confirm, construct, and/or repair their identity in the face of another. I would like to extend this argument by exploring how the participants' and facilitators' identities are unravelled, opened up, discarded, and threatened through interactions with each other. Compared with interviews, interactions can capture dynamics that participants may not notice or be able to articulate (Alvesson, 2003). They are real time recordings of phenomena rather than a reconstruction or memory of an interaction as would be given in an interview.

It is important to clarify what I define as an interaction. I focus on verbal interactions between two or more people that occur either online (written and recorded on the website), or in a face-to-face setting (spoken and recorded in field notes). I acknowledge that these interactions are embedded in a history of preceding interactions, and therefore in the reporting of the empirical material I describe any relevant contextual details. I also use other forms of data that have an interactional quality. The first of these are what I call "slices of talk" and represent sections of online posts I have extracted from larger discussion forums. They are interactional as they are part of a conversation with others, but I use them primarily to indicate different perceptions of a given topic. I also use written narratives, usually from reflective assignments. These have an interactional quality, as although they are written by one participant, they are constructed with the awareness that the facilitators (and I) will read them.

While there are various methods one can use to analyse interactions (see Fairhurst, 2004), at a broad level I follow Crevani and colleagues (2010) who are interested in what interactions "do" as they are performed, and how they develop in a given time. In other words, using discourse analysis I focus primarily upon what is happening in the moment, what the participants seem to be "up to", the effects of an interaction, and the different ways in which this could be interpreted (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001, p. 77). Following a constructionist orientation, I avoid analytical techniques that categorise interactional data into pre-defined

codes and schemata (Fairhurst, 2004). I will now elaborate further upon my process of discourse analysis.

Discursive Analysis of Empirical Material

The ethnographic nature of this project requires me to describe how I have organised and made sense of the enormous amount of data I collected. I used discourse analysis, which involves two stages: the creation of the seven discourses of undoing, and the discursive analysis of the data pertaining to these discourses.

The experience of doing discourse analysis has been anything but linear. Rather, it has involved moments of figuring out the lay of the land, so to speak, then zooming in to analyse certain data slices in detail. It has therefore been a recursive, iterative process. I started analysing my data at a thematic level as soon as I began fieldwork. Over the next eight months, I organised the data into several themes, one of which was identity. Within this theme, there seemed to be a wealth of interesting data regarding loss/letting go, identity destruction, and identity growth. After consulting the literature, and continuing to explore the data, these seemingly disparate concepts were brought together under the term “undoing”. Now that I had this focus on undoing, I trawled back through all the data looking for more instances which related to it, challenged it, and expanded upon it. After some experimentation, I grouped all undoing data under the various verbs the participants used in order to capture the various movements involved in undoing. This resulted in over 20 different movements. I condensed some themes, and discarded the weaker ones, and eventually I arrived at seven discourses of undoing: “shake up”, “cut apart”, “open up”, “let go”, “slip back”, “flounder”, and “play”. I call these discourses because it seems that they occur across the programme, across more than one person, and constitute the participants’ reality or experiences of identity work on the programme.

Within each of the seven discourses, I chose a combination of different forms of interactional data such as: a section of “slices of talk” to show the range of ways in which this discourse is expressed; a series of shorter interactions; a narrative or metaphor from one participant; and/or a longer interaction. I selected the most insightful and illuminating material and performed a more concentrated form of discourse analysis.

I felt somewhat anxious about how to actually perform this more intensive discursive analysis of specific texts. There did not seem to be a resource which outlined a “how to” recipe, which would have felt most comforting to a doctoral student. I investigated Systemic Functional Linguistics as that seemed to offer some guidelines about what to look for, yet it seemed almost too structured and technical. At the same time, it did not feel scholarly enough to rely on my own intuition with the data. Based on advice from Dan Kärreman, I focused first on my gut feel in order to navigate what data to emphasise, and then I used more systemic approaches to analysis once I had narrowed down the data. I consulted linguistics books such as Fowler and Kress (1979) to look at how prepositions, pronouns, and verbs can be analysed.

My process of discourse analysis involved various levels: I did close-up analyses of selected interactions or stories; and I also looked across multiple interactions or slices of data in order to consider different people, patterns, or timeframes. I focused on how language constructs the experience of being undone, and how language can be used to undo people. Therefore, I looked at: verbs and their meanings to understand the experience of undoing; pronouns to explore who is doing/not doing the movement; metaphors to flesh out the richness and contradictions of such movements; and how the conversation moves in order to explore how undoing can occur in an interaction. I looked at the emotions, values, and assumptions associated with the discourse. I also considered the implications of the discourse on the participants, and explored how it can shift, morph, or be disrupted.

I wrote multiple drafts of each discourse section, each time adding more layers, altering my voice, drawing out questions, and testing my analysis. I was still collecting data during this time, and therefore I was adding more material to the data set. Each set of data was analysed three to five times: I printed unmarked versions of my data tables and tried to see it with fresh eyes and see more layers and interpretations. As a result, the discourses changed over time: some split off into different discourses, and others ended up in places I had not predicted.

It seems therefore that I have followed what Alvesson and Kärreman (2000a) call discursive pragmatism. The authors describe this as an alternative to myopic approaches that focus on the functional and constructive aspects of language itself. Rather, discursive pragmatism, whilst still holding an interest in discursive resources such as texts and conversations, seeks to take interpretation beyond the level of the text. I have followed their recommendation to focus on particular situations, such as a meeting or an interaction, and to expand upon its many dimensions, rather than trying to conclusively capture all of the interactions witnessed during fieldwork.

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000a) challenge the researcher to take the use of language seriously, but without falling prey to a strict focus on discursivism in which the study focuses on the level of talk without considering the meaning entwined with talk. This involves an attempt from the researcher to capture how “the natives” make sense of what they are doing because “as long as one restricts oneself to the level of talk, those who are actually talking become curiously fugitive” (p. 150). However, it is impossible to provide an all-encompassing understanding of organisational phenomena due to the “multiplicity of possible meaning [and] the complexities of social practices” (p. 147). In admitting this shortcoming, the role of research therefore is to “capture this richness rather than make questionable claims of completeness and/or exhaustiveness” (p. 147).

Limitations

This research design involves a number of limitations, which have influenced the interpretations and propositions this thesis makes. These concern the single research setting, the absence of interviews, and the nature of written and online data.

While the decision to focus on one programme means I am able to give detailed insights about what is going on in a local setting, it makes it difficult for me to say something more broadly about leadership development as a phenomenon (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). In addition, the organisation and programme I researched could be seen as an atypical or unusual form of leadership development as they use a social constructionist philosophy towards leadership and development. Therefore, it may be difficult to extend or generalise this research to more mainstream leadership development settings.

Another limitation centres on the absence of interviews in my research design. While the (over)reliance on interviews in organisational research has been noted and critiqued (Alvesson, 2003), I do wonder if and how my analyses might have been different if I had access to this source. I chose not to conduct interviews for a number of reasons. I was more interested in how identity work and undoing happens in the moment between people, an interest which is better captured by focusing on interactions and observations rather than interview talk. I may have gathered some interesting reflections on these interactions from participants; however, participants often spoke quite honestly about significant interactions in their online posts and reflective journals. I was aware that interviews can create unhelpful dynamics such as script following, moral storytelling, and impression management (Alvesson, 2003), which may have hindered the ability to gather rich insights. In addition, I already had an enormous amount of excellent data, much of which I was not able to use due to space constraints; therefore, for pragmatic reasons, the prospect of collecting more data

seemed unnecessary. Whilst I can rationalise all these different justifications, nevertheless, because interviews are the norm for qualitative research, I still feel like something is missing without them.

One of the limitations of virtual environments is that participants are able to log off and avoid contributing and interacting. There were numerous occasions when participants were challenged quite pointedly regarding their assumptions (these could be called undoing attempts); however, the individual either ignored or avoided the posting. Such silence makes it difficult to explore whether this is an active deflection or display of resistance, or a wounded retreat. In addition, some participants found it difficult to engage in an online environment, and therefore they were not well represented in online interactions; although, as noted earlier, usually these people were more vocal at residential workshops. The reflective assignments are also problematic as the nature of writing can conceal the fragmentation, struggle, and tensions that the participants may be experiencing, and may be used as a means of stabilising one's state of being. These texts may be influenced by impression management and moral storytelling, as some participants admitted that their writing was influenced by the concern, "is this what the facilitators want me to say?"

Summary of Methodology

Overall, this chapter describes in detail the methodological design of the research project, which centres largely on the decision to do an 18-month ethnographic study of a leadership development programme that traverses both online and offline worlds. Following the influence of social constructionism, I focus mainly on interactions as my unit of analysis, and perform discourse analysis on this material. Table 5 below summarises the key elements of this design.

Table 5.

Summary of Research Design

Research Paradigm	Methodology	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical social constructionism • Sensitivity to role of power and discourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination of traditional and virtual ethnographic study • 18-month leadership development programme • 30 participants • 6 facilitators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face observation (15 days, 250 pages of field notes) • Online observation (6600 postings) • Document analysis (over 400 pages of written assignments) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourse analysis of interactions and other texts

This chapter has justified these methodological choices, as well as admitted the limitations that accompany such choices. I have also described the research organisation, programme, and participants, as well as my role in the research. I have clarified the measures taken to ensure the research has been carried out in an ethical manner. It is now time to turn to the empirical material. In the following three chapters, I present my analyses and findings of the seven discourses of undoing.

CHAPTER 6

The Exhilaration and Exhaustion of Unfastening One's Identity

Introduction to Findings

The reporting of my empirical material is structured around seven discourses that describe the different ways in which undoing seems to manifest in the empirical material. These are: “open up”, “flounder”, “play”, “shake up”, “cut apart”, “let go”, and “slip back”. These titles originate from verbs the participants have used to describe their identity work.

There seems to be a different energy and impact associated with each discourse: on the one hand, the discourses “open up”, “shake up”, “let go”, and “play” appear to invigorate, delight, and excite the participants. Whilst there may be inklings of anxiety and disorientation, on the whole these discourses generate hope, curiosity, and therefore a willingness to experience them. On the other hand, “cut apart”, “slip back”, and “flounder” seem to incite more struggle, fatigue, and pain. Whilst these responses may be generative, they can also result in participants stepping back, feeling helpless, and becoming stuck. In order to capture the ebb and flow of these different movements, I have structured my data chapters to move between a more energising discourse and a more debilitating discourse. Figure 2 on the following page offers a visual representation of the structure of the three findings' chapters.

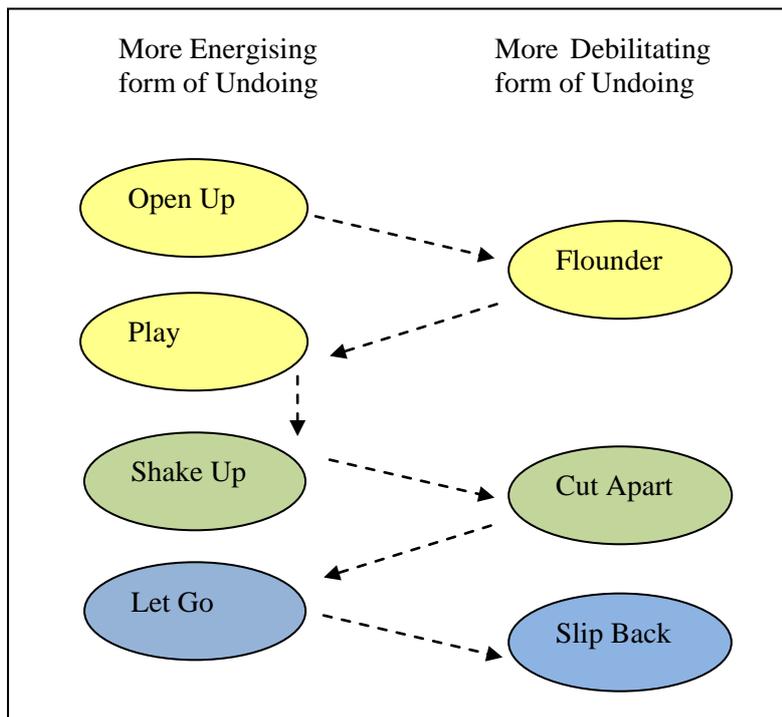


Figure 2. Layout of findings' chapters

This map shows the order of discussion for each discourse. The arrows indicate the order in which the discourses will be discussed in the chapters; they are not suggesting a possible order for how the discourses are experienced. The yellow ovals represent the three discourses covered first in chapter 6. These are grouped together as they all deal, in different ways, with the idea of identities becoming stuck or unstuck. The discourses in green ovals are discussed in chapter 7. These two discourses speak to the process of disrupting or agitating identities, and the fragility and volatility of this experience. The final discourses, contained in the blue ovals, are the focus of chapter 8. These two discourses offer insights regarding attempts to discard identities, and the difficulty of doing so.

It is also necessary to describe how I structure each empirical section. There are four main parts to each discourse section. I begin with an introduction that highlights the overall interpretation of this discourse. In order to do this, I provide a short table of words and phrases from the empirical material to suggest how research participants describe this

discourse. Following this, I provide a table presenting slices of talk and/or shorter interactions. This section is called “A Selection of Data”, and it attempts to show the range of ways the particular discourse of undoing is experienced. The interactions included here are truncated excerpts of longer interactions. The third section focuses on one to two extended interactions between participants or stories (called “Extended Data”) in order to explore the discourse in a more sustained and detailed manner. These longer interactions give the reader an opportunity to see how undoing may be created in interactions between people. Please note that I use the signal “[...]” for areas where I have truncated the online data. Any other strings of full stops (i.e. “...”) have been written by the participants. I finish each discourse with a summary and a series of key questions.

My analysis of each discourse addresses how each discourse is created or triggered, and who is involved (and not involved) in this process. I am also interested in how this discourse is felt and experienced by participants and in some cases the facilitators. This often collides with the assumptions, rationales, and contradictions that surround the discourse. Finally, I attempt to trace some of the consequences of experiencing this discourse. I now turn to the three discourses that are covered in this chapter: “open up”, “floundering”, and “play”. These discourses are grouped together as they each deal with dynamics of identity work regarding becoming stuck or unfastened from fixed identities.

Undoing Discourse 1: Being Opened up

This section explores the energising experience of opening one's self up. Some participants suggest that over the course of the programme they have opened up their mindset and identity from a closed position, whilst others allude to feeling loosened from a stuck position. Opening and loosening therefore are conceptualised as the untying and releasing of who one is to who one can be. The table below offers a selection of indicative phrases from participants.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I really want to be more open-minded• doors that were opened• open myself up• open my mind | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• eye-opening• opened my eyes• I loosened up a little |
|---|---|

These data suggest that the participants feel opened up in terms of their knowing (“mind”), seeing (“eyes”), and being (“myself”). Such opening up appears to offer them more choices, pathways, and directions to move in, and as such is generally an enjoyable experience for the participants. Such a discourse may also speak to being emancipated from fixed or constraining identities and ideas. I now turn to a series of online comments from across the duration of the programme.

A selection of data: Online talk

The first table below contains data from participants during the initial stages of the programme. The second table captures online comments from later in the programme. I will analyse both data sets to explore how perceptions of opening up may change across time.

Earlier in the programme

I had let go of a lot of my preconceptions and opinions which I had held onto for a long time, I was pleased to do so as I really want to be more open-minded anyhow so I was pleased to send my old ideas packing :) (Anon, evaluation survey for 1st residential)

I really appreciated the doors that were opened in terms of the way we looked the notions of leadership and how we were let go to a certain extent to view this from our own viewpoint whilst still taking on board the valuable viewpoints of others (both facilitators and

participants). We were given space to express our own views and a very safe environment was created. (Anon, evaluation survey for 1st residential)

The original cluster situation opened my eyes up to a certain extent about how much we could share and exactly how much we had to gain from the experience. It allowed us to share thoughts etc in a safe secure environment. (Anon, evaluation survey for 1st residential)

I think I have lost my set beliefs in regards to leadership. I can be fairly closed off and at times not open to debating something when I have made a decision on something. I think I have lost that quite a bit as I'm a lot more open to the learning opportunities offered by these discussions. As a result I have gained that ability to open myself up to learn and grow further. (Anon, evaluation survey for 1st residential)

I can also see examples of people asking "wicked questions" of me and I can also see examples of the way I found cracks and moved to open them up. (Anon, evaluation survey for 1st residential)

I think I have open[ed] my mind to what leadership is really about - and have lost a bit of my thoughts that may have been holding me back in this space. I am more open to what is to come. (Anon, evaluation survey for 1st residential)

[One activity] showed me how open and honest we were with each other after 3 days and how that can only grow. Honesty is something that has really stuck with me after the weekend. What I mean by that is I don't want to hold anything back from this group and with the people I work with. I feel softer and more relaxed if that is possible after the weekend...I feel excited, happy, encourage[d], and open to opportunity. (Natalie, online post)

Later in the programme

I am still working through this concept but at this point I believe my leadership identity as someone who shuts down ideas very quickly was eye-opening. That is not the identity I want to present. (Anon, evaluation survey for 3rd residential)

My thinking has opened up to new and illogical ways of problem solving and playing with concepts. It [has] opened my eyes to new possibilities and made my thinking far more innovative than it ever used to be. I have unlearned so many of my boundaries that limited my thinking to only the clear and straightforward and now I am able to think beyond the immediate solution. For me this has completely altered my reality for the better. I couldn't have asked for a more meaningful outcome and I have no expectations for the remainder of this programme. Not because I don't believe I have learnings still to take from the course but because the learnings I have had so far have been so unexpected. I enter the final phase of this programme open-minded and full of anticipation for the person that comes out the other side. (Jonathan, development snapshot 1)

It's only now that I realise that when I started the programme, I had some real boundaries that were holding me back (a lot of these were in response to the really tough environment I was operating in external to the programme). I still do but I'm becoming more and more aware of them. It feels great to have been able to "drop my guard" quite a bit and be much more open with myself and others about who I am. Up until recently, my ego and a lot of insecurity got in the way of my ability to learn and grow in much more powerful ways than I realised. It also had a huge negative impact on my ability to connect with others. (Jason, development snapshot 1)

When an activity/project/endeavour is bigger than your capability, it becomes a domain for leadership. [...] I continue to marvel at my change in behaviour and attitude: I somehow realized that it [a project] was bigger than me, and that would need help – cracks and edges formed all over the show – and the best thing is they reveal leadership. Almost as though my crystal was cracking and I loosened up [a] little. (Jimmy, travel plan)

In the initial stages of the programme, the participants' talk about opening up is mainly centred on their mind and letting go of what they know ("old ideas") in order to become more "open-minded". They seem to see opening up as a prerequisite for being able to "learn and grow further". The participants appear willing to be opened up ("I was pleased", "I really want to be more open") as they feel as though one has gained rather than lost anything. Being opened up is associated with learning, growth, truth, honesty, opportunity, and being "softer and more relaxed". It is contrasted with being "closed off" and having "old ideas", which are "holding me back". Opening one's self up therefore is seen as a constructive move away from undesirable ways of being. The participants also seem to take responsibility for their own opening up ("I have open[ed] my mind", "to open myself up"), as well as allowing others to do this for them ("the doors that were opened").

As the programme progresses, the participants seem to talk about opening up in identity terms – not tying it solely to knowledge and leadership thinking as they did at the start of the programme. There appears to be a stark contrast between the connotations of being open and being closed: the identities that participants seem to want to open up are "limited", "clear", "straightforward", "crystal", in which they are "guarded", insecure, and held back by "boundaries". In comparison, the "opened up" identity seems to be more playful, "innovative", "illogical", "new", full of "possibilities", "aware", able to "connect with others", and able to "learn and grow". Such connotations may explain why opening up seems to be a desirable process to go through as part of one's identity work.

There seems to be an unpredictable and surprising quality to the process of being "opened up" ("the learnings I have had so far have been so unexpected"). This leaves one participant "full of anticipation for the person that comes out the other side". Another participant

“marvel[s]” at how they have changed by being “loosened up [a] little”. This alludes to the excitement, hope, and curiosity that can accompany this form of undoing.

I am intrigued by the faint assumption evident in both data sets that the process of opening up will reveal the “truth” about leadership (“what leadership is really about”). Such suggestions imply that the essential factors of leadership can be exposed. Another person describes how his loosening up created some “cracks and edges” and that the “best thing” about these fractures is that “they reveal leadership”. This suggests an interpretation of leadership as lying underneath, or at the core, and something that can be accessed once doors are prised open: leadership is what some participants become opened up to. I will now focus on one participant’s story in order to explore in more detail this idea of being loosened up.

Extended data: Loosening from a stuck position

The image of loosening up offers a slightly different movement to opening up, as it means “to make less firmly fixed in place” (“Random House Dictionary,” 2010). It seems to imply a journey from a stuck position to being set in motion. It also alludes to the emancipation from certain identities as loosening up is defined as being “set free from bonds, restraints, or constraints” (“Random House Dictionary,” 2010). The participant below talks about unfastening herself from a stuck mindset. Savannah wrote this story as part of an online assignment (“travel log”), approximately one year into the programme.

Well I have had a hectic few months with lots of movement, it has been exciting and challenging and I have a new enthusiasm for work and life. Going into the last residential I was in a real place of stuckness within my work life. I felt flat and was considering a change in career. Coming out of the residential I decided my next 6 month focus would be concentrated on moving from this place of stuckness into movement and action.

The real kick-start for me was 3 weeks after the residential at our work function. After 6 months feeling like I was in a big lull, I received ambassador of the year (which is voted on by your peers). [...] This did confuse me though, how can I have been unhappy and stuck and others not recognised this? This is when I decided that this feeling of stuckness was a mindset and it was my mindset and it was not shared by those looking in.

How do I change how I feel about the situation? Why do I feel stuck and others can't see this? There were so many questions which I was excited about exploring and so the real journey began.

I decided I needed some real help exploring so I got in touch with Sally and we met to walk and talk, a week later I met with Jeff, Natasha and Sally and again we all pushed ideas around the table. These conversations helped me pinpoint that I was unhappy with my current work situation and that there was not the same motivation there as there had been in the past.

It was now time to talk with my boss. [...] I met with my boss and discussed this feeling of stuckness and he was a little shocked but it almost made things a lot clearer for him. I explained that I felt bogged down by the little stuff, and my enjoyment factor was decreasing. Wow it felt good to get it off my chest. Anyway within 2 days I had a new project which he just dropped on me. [...] Really exciting, really fresh and new and just another blank canvas to work with yay! I love that my boss read from the conversation give me something big and exciting that I can sink my teeth into. [...]

After these conversations I decided my biggest work in the journey ahead is to find tools to move myself and others from stuckness into action and it's been really exciting. My newest thing is having conversations with people who are motivating and engaging and ask me curly questions, debate, disagree and rattle me up a little. I am currently aiming at one a week but lately I have had 3 or 4 a week and I love it. Work life is pretty busy and that's how I like it. The love is returning.

Savannah's story seems to be about her movement, her "journey" over a few months. She describes how she was in a "real place of stuckness", which made her feel "flat". Being "stuck" therefore seems to be a place of non-movement, as she describes herself as "bogged down" and "in a big lull". It seems that she wishes to free herself from being stuck, to a more active and fluid state. She uses more active and vigorous language to describe who she is in this loosening process ("hectic", "exciting", "challenging", "new enthusiasm", "busy", and "kick-start"), suggesting loosening up therefore is a state of being.

There appears to be an association with being stuck and her waning love for her job. The impetus to move from "stuckness into action" is because being stuck is a place without love, enjoyment, or thrill. She seems to feel demoralised by "the little stuff" which "bog[s] her down" in this place. Such feelings lead her to question her commitment and motivation, and

seem to fuel her desire to break free from it. As she unfastens from this position, the “love” returns.

It appears that loosening or opening up is a relational experience. In the first data table, participants suggested that going through a process of opening up creates a feeling of solidarity, belonging, and community. Savannah seems to draw on this community in her efforts to unfasten herself. Initially, Savannah talks about “stuckness” as a mindset, as something that can be hidden from others, and which cannot be “shared by those looking in”. It therefore seems like a lonely, internal place – a place which Savannah assumes she needs to get out of herself. However, she disrupts this solitary portrayal by connecting with other people to “kick-start” her mission. Her description of the conversation she has with other programme participants is framed in the language of movement – they “walk and talk”, and “push ideas around the table”. Her story ends with a proclamation that she wants to “find tools to move myself and others from stuckness into action”. One of these “tools” is having conversations and debates with people who “rattle me up” and “ask me curly questions”. Interactions with others therefore appear to be a vital element of loosening up; it is not a process which one can do on their own.

Key questions and summary

The participants seem to enjoy and desire this process of opening or loosening up their mindset and identity from closed or fixed positions. Such a process appears to fill them with excitement, hope, anticipation, and even love. Participants seem to open up themselves, receive the opening up attempts of others and reciprocate these. It may reconnect them with themselves, their work, and/or other people. The data point to some further questions which I will now explore.

To begin with, the participants do not talk about what they will guard; rather, one admits “I do not want to hold anything back from this group”. If we assume that no one can be entirely opened up, what are the parts of the participant’s identity that (need to) remain hidden, private, closed off, or fixed? Does leadership development have a role in retaining or maintaining aspects of one’s identity as needing protection? Furthermore, is being stuck or fixed a state to be feared and escaped from as Savannah seems to? Or does it provide a necessary holding zone for development?

A more critically orientated question would focus on what and whose knowledge the participants are being opened up to. As “to open” is defined as “without a covering” (“Random House Dictionary,” 2010) and implies a sense of being unprotected and exposed, the participants could be seen as vulnerable in this power/knowledge context. A critical reading might argue that the process of opening up is necessary to render the participant accessible to the programme’s discourses of leadership. If we assume that knowledge is inextricably linked with power, and that opening up is related to one’s knowledge (about themselves, leadership, etc.), and that the facilitation team can be perceived as holding expertise, then what dynamics of power exist in this process? I now turn to the second discourse, “floundering”, in which participants struggle with becoming stuck.

Undoing Discourse 2: Floundering

Whilst some participants can feel energised by being opened up, others may fall into a state of floundering. This discourse refers to the thrashing about which some participants seem to experience when trying to make sense of their individual and collective identity. Importantly, there is a perceived helplessness with this faltering state, as they feel unable to get themselves out of it and therefore call upon others to assist them. Some also feel concerned that they do not know what direction they are heading in, and therefore they feel stuck and stagnant. This section uses interactions from one cluster (Emerald) as they seem to experience floundering over a period of several months. The table of phrases below indicates how I am framing this discourse called floundering.

- | | |
|--|---|
| • we keep getting stuck and not knowing how to get ourselves out | • going around and around in circles |
| • I am floundering and waiting to be told | • batting it back and forth between you |
| • a lumpy ride | • cannot find how to actually get there |
| • going nowhere | • no idea how to move things |
| | • I don't know where to go from here |
| | • suddenly I have felt a big movement |

The frustration and helplessness that seems to accompany floundering feels palpable (“no idea”, “cannot find”, “I don't know”). It leaves one person “waiting to be told”. There seems to be a repetitiveness to floundering (“around and around”, “keep getting stuck”, “back and forth”), which they seem unable to break free from – perhaps alluding to their calls for help. It may involve sudden surges of movements (“big movement”) which can make it feel like “a lumpy ride”. Participants also appear to feel uncertain about the direction or location one is/should be heading in.

A selection of data: Shorter online interactions

The following data tables cover four online interactions amongst the Emerald cluster that occurred between month 9 and 11 in the programme (approximately the halfway point). I

have included this range of data as they each show various facets of how floundering is created and worked with. Emerald cluster comprises four participants: Natasha, Renee, Kelly, and Derek, and an assigned facilitator, Rob. I offer an analysis of these interactions at the end of the four tables.

Interaction 1 (Month 9)

Rob: Hi this is a quick invite for you to “check in” and let us know where you are at. How you doin’?

Derek: I would be a 3.5 out of 5 at the moment - a few weeks back I was a 5 after Natasha’s discussions with me but now have stepped back a bit and getting a bit overwhelmed like Renee. I am feeling a bit “blah” for lack of a better word. I just think we are going around and around in circles and feel like we are getting so far behind and we are not giving anything back to the other cluster?! I also feel personally I have gone backwards a bit and feel like I have nothing valuable to input again which is a pity. I think we need to grab conflict and comfort - grab a question and work on it so that we have something specific to take to the other cluster - is this not where we are going - I think we need a bit more guidance to be perfectly honest - it is clear we have been struggling - three facilitators have now stepped in and back out again and I feel we are not confident enough yet to say YES we have got it - don’t you think it is time to maybe push us in the right direction OR if not then maybe it is time to step up, grow some kahunas and do something haha sorry but I am just getting frustrated with this!!

Interaction 2 (Month 9)

The following data are a slice of an interaction from a longer conversation. Leah is a facilitator on this programme – but not Emerald cluster’s facilitator. She was asked to assist this cluster with some of their group dynamics.

Leah: Without doing this kind of “step back and look for something bigger”...you end up batting it back and forth between you...you gain personal and interpersonal benefit from that...but you don’t find the leadership work in it eh? So you have fantastic energy at finding issues and putting them between you.....but you don’t seem to have the energy to follow their lead in taking you to edges/ cracks/ issues that are beyond you and about more than you....and that’s where leadership development goes? Assume what matters to you, matters somewhere in fundamental ways to this education space you all belong to....and because it does...it needs the leadership that starts with them mattering to you but moves to mattering to many. [...]

Derek: We DEFINITELY need to discuss those points that Rob and Leah brought to our attention - what thread was that in? Can we start a new thread with these We HAVE to start finding these things we care about in Education - there is so much but we need to narrow it down - maybe we can start with a big list and see what matches up and go from there? Just an idea? Although I am really passionate about what we have been talking about Natasha ... Thanks for replying here also Leah 😊 and this I guess is where we need to

continue our discussion Natasha as I am so passionate Keen to (like Leah has suggested) talk about these things in a bigger picture - talk about how they relate to the wider education sector - who does it effect and why Leah you have described perfectly what we have been doing on a personal level and we need to take that bigger step and follow this edge/crack and follow the leadership development here Really keen to continue my challenge and push to find this in a wider sense I can see what we need to find but for the life of me cannot find how to actually get there - do you think anything I have suggested here will help? Let's get into this tonight and tomorrow

Kelly: Very quick response while my class is silently reading. Without internet access I was jotting down things, and coming on now to write them much of what I have written is a cross between what Leah wrote and Natasha added on here about how the conversations kept going back to the personal (which I think was where I was getting frustrated as I could see the benefit individually but not how that would link into the greater cause idea or as a shared backyard), but in the same respect, having no idea how to move things in the direction they needed to go.....

Interaction 3 (Month 10)

Natasha: I think that we have a real sense of ownership of this work and our task. But I think we are really really really really stuck. And this saps energy. I see that we have unlocked bits and pieces and we have talked around and through and about this. But I can also see that we are all exhausted from the process which feels like it has just gone on and on and on. I may only be speaking for myself here - but I don't think that I am...I think we get excited because we think we may have finally stumbled across the thing that you guys want us to 'get' or understand and that this in turn is going to help our leadership development. That is not to say that we are not willing to do the work, find our own path and take responsibility for our own learning - but maybe that we don't really know what we are looking for so are waiting for this affirmation. I think that we keep getting stuck and not knowing how to get ourselves out of it. [...] I just feel like I get it but I don't really get it. And that I can see the theory but can't grasp it and that while I am really trying to take ownership of my own learning here I feel like I am floundering and waiting to be told that I am on the right track and for someone to help me to make the next steps - which you have been doing for us often - but I still find myself really stuck. [...]

Derek: I have to agree Natasha that this process has dragged on and we are stuck and we have little excited spells but then lose interest quickly when we realise that didn't solve our problem [...] I still don't see where we need to head with this line of thinking or what we can actually do... [...] would love some ideas is basically what I'm asking for.

Interaction 4 (Month 11)

Natasha: Confession: I am really unhappy with how things are going at the moment and have been seriously considering withdrawing from the programme.

I will try to explain:

I feel like I just can't get into the experiment task because I feel like it is contrived and I just cannot motivate myself to get involved because I would rather keep doing the work that I am doing in my real leadership spaces.

I feel like I don't really want to experiment for the sake of it with the leadership work that I

am already doing because I feel like what I am doing is really really working – that’s not to say that there isn’t room for experimentation - I don’t think I am perfect at all - BUT I do feel like the current discussion/space/edge isn’t inspiring me to create an experiment within my work space - because I feel like this is really carefully balanced.

I feel like I don’t want to create an experiment for the sake of creating an experiment.

I feel exhausted by all the questioning - which often doesn’t seem to lead anywhere.[...]

Kelly: I really enjoy our cluster conversations, but feel we are always hampered by this overwhelming sense of trying to get to a place we think we are meant to be getting to and then not knowing if we are anywhere near and then lose the enjoyment of the process. [...]

Natasha: [...] I feel stressed that I wanted this programme to be invigorating and stimulating and in reality I feel like it is draining and demotivating - I feel like this lack of energy is coming through into how I am feeling about everything else - and has added to my stress. I am somewhat of a perfectionist! [...]

Floundering can be felt as a “draining” and “exhausting” experience which leaves the participants feeling “stressed”, “super-anxious”, “blah”, “demotivated” and sapped of energy which even permeates their “real leadership space” outside of the programme. Their repetitive language such as “on and on and on”, “around and around”, “really, really, really, really” and “around and through and about” evokes a sense of wallowing, circling, and “dragg[ing] on” which they are struggling to “get ourselves out of”. This helplessness is central to the definition of floundering. Derek asks for “ideas” and proposes to the facilitators, “don’t you think it is time to maybe push us in the right direction”; however, even when they are, they still seem unable to move (“three facilitators have now stepped in and back out again”).

It is possible to suggest some key triggers which seem to cause this floundering. From the early stages of the programme, the Emerald cluster were determined to master the art of “killer questioning”;⁷ however, as the programme progresses, Natasha admits “I feel exhausted by all the questioning - which often doesn’t seem to lead anywhere”. There is a suggestion that floundering is a result of “unlock[ing] bits and pieces”, as though the group is unsure what to do after this unlocking. Natasha’s comment that the questioning does not

⁷ Killer questioning is positioned as a key leadership practice the programme attempts to develop (see page 107).

“lead anywhere” presents an important element: the group seems to be floundering because they believe there is a final “right” direction and destination they should be heading towards – which is primarily determined by the facilitators. Their interactions are littered with references to “the thing that you guys want us to ‘get’ or understand”, “a place we think we are meant to be getting to”, and the “right direction”. There seems to be a pressure that accompanies this expectation to find the “right” pathway for their development, which is “overwhelming” and “hampers” the process, causing them to “lose enjoyment”. This assumption that the facilitators know the place they should be getting to could partially explain the participants’ reliance upon the facilitators to help them.

Leah’s observation of the cluster’s interaction alludes to how floundering is created. She describes how they “end up batting [ideas] back and forth” without “step[ping] back and look[ing] for something bigger”. They keep their discussions fixed on the “personal and interpersonal” rather than finding “the leadership work” that goes “beyond you and about more than you”. According to Leah, it seems that floundering is a leadership challenge: in order to break out of floundering, they need to “lead” themselves to bigger “edges/cracks/issues”.

It seems that the group remains in this floundering stage as they focus on talking about future actions, rather than doing them in the moment. Derek’s response to Leah is riddled with future-orientated statements like “we DEFINITELY need to”, “we have to”, “can we”, “[I’m] keen to”, and finishing with “let’s get into this tonight and tomorrow”. Leah’s posting seems to have given him some clarity about “what we need to find”, but despite her suggestions about how to interact differently, he says, “for the life of me [I] cannot find how to actually get there”. Such an interaction indicates how floundering is created in interactions amongst individuals, and therefore that it can be difficult to break free from.

Derek suggests that they “grab a question and work on it” as one way of breaking their floundering pattern. This notion of holding on to something more specific is indicated by Natasha too whose statement “I am floundering” seems to be because “I can see the theory but I can’t grasp it”. Her inability to understand her development means that whilst she is “really trying to take ownership of her learning” she is struggling to do so. This tension between knowing they need to “take ownership” (or as Derek says, “maybe it is time to step up, grow some kahunas and do something”) and yet asking for the facilitators to “help me” seems to be crucial to floundering. Months later, Natasha admits that “someone else [Leah] came into the group and gave us something to hang on to [...] which we grabbed because we were exhausted from the whole ‘defining a backyard’ business but I don’t feel like we ever really took full ownership of this and I don’t know why that is”. This admission suggests that the exhaustion which accompanies the helpless struggle of floundering might tempt participants to “grab on to” an idea they have asked the facilitators to give them – but at the risk of compromising their ownership and engagement.

Interaction 4 suggests that one of the risks of floundering is that participants may withdraw from the programme, or that participants may remain in the programme but pull back from their interactions with their co-floundering participants (as Natasha did). The stress, anxiety, and unhappiness Natasha was feeling has seeped into non-programme parts of her life. She seems to be disappointed that the programme is “draining and demotivating” rather than being “invigorating and stimulating”. This suggests that participants may need support to deal with these troughs in their energy and commitment to the programme to mitigate their withdrawal – visible or not – from the programme.

Extended interaction: Floundering in action

This interaction is initiated by Natasha, who features prominently in talk about floundering in the previous data tables. This interaction occurred approximately six months into the programme and therefore precedes the interactions from the previous data tables.

Natasha: Right now I feel like we are trying to run before we can walk. I don't think we have even come close to finding our edge yet - I don't think we have had the conversations we need to be having, I don't think that there is a lot of challenging and questioning going on [...] the conversations aren't really going anywhere. I am feeling frustrated that not much is going on in here. There is conversation, but I don't feel it is particularly challenging. There have been a few times when I have started to write stuff like "I don't know where to go from here" and have deleted it and gone back over and over all of our posts and tried to make a direction for us. To be honest I am getting pretty exhausted by it.

Derek: OK so I am not sure if it is my position to reply to this or if it is directed at me or not but I feel I have been putting in a real effort to contribute as well - maybe not as challenging as some but I have given it a good shot and I agree NO we have not made huge progress but to suggest no one else is asking good questions is, I believe a bit harsh. [...]

Natasha: [...] I certainly didn't say that no-one else is asking good questions. However, I did say and still maintain that I do not believe that there is as much questioning going on as there needs to be.

Derek: [...] I hope we can get somewhere over the weekend if we are all available and maybe try to get into this cluster to cluster stuff early next week? Rob - can we have your advice and input here from a facilitator's point of view - there must be other clusters struggling? [...]

Rob: Even if I did have an "outfit" and a phone booth unfortunately I do not think I can rescue you from this one. I do think your questioning threads were starting to make some ground after much time of going around in circles. I am enjoying the new energy and push between you and encourage you to keep this going. Make some bold statements, let your opinion and feeling come out [as] this is where you can push each other to explore where assumptions or questions might sit. Natasha you have been trying to do this eh! I suggest you keep going with this. But set out [a] clear process plan and some deadlines for you to agree to. Probably start with Natasha's last question around what do we need to do?

Derek: Thanks for your response Rob 😊 [...] We just need more focussed time on this with people responding and keeping on track ...

I feel that I am now going outside my comfort zone a lot more with my comments and I am going to be a lot more honest and push everyone to explore a bit more. [...]

Natasha: I think we are doing really well with our talking - there is so so so so so much discussion going on. I think it is the "what" we are talking about that is going to make the difference for us. Thinking about how are we going to make it meaningful or how are we trying to get what we are talking about to move us to a point. [...] I think the challenge for us is to drive this harder - to challenge ourselves to work towards our goal - which is to find our edge. [...]

Kelly: [...] I think I have just been trying to make sense of the info - often when I come on here, it is sneakily while my class (like now) is working or later in the evening when my brain has been so tired I often haven't been able to get out what I am thinking.

This interaction points to a number of dynamics of floundering. Natasha's frustration seems to be coming from her inability to "make a direction" for this cluster despite going back "over and over" through their posts. Perhaps she sees this as a failure of her ability as a leader. Direction seems to be important to Natasha and she is struggling with the fact that their "conversations aren't really going anywhere" – despite others like Derek thinking that this is "a bit harsh". Natasha seems to hold hope of getting out of this floundering by the group challenging and questioning each other more, calling on the group to "drive this harder". However, some participants' express that they have felt challenged which suggests a disconnection in this group around their expectations of unsettling: Natasha seems to desire more unsettling but is not getting it.

Derek's somewhat defensive response to Natasha's challenging post is an example of what Leah described elsewhere as the group "batting" concepts between each other. I can sense this constraining or stifling of pathways when I read a string of postings from this cluster. There seems to be a tight framing around what the participants see and discuss, which is anchored on their personal or interpersonal dynamics. Kelly's posts could be seen as self-deprecating as she questions her contribution to the group, creating this tone of diminishing possibilities. The apparent reluctance from the participants to build upon each other's posts in more constructive ways suggests that such building and constructing behaviour are necessary movements to break out of floundering.

Again, Derek talks in future-orientated terms, hoping that they "get somewhere in the weekend", rather than suggesting how they can "make some ground" in the present posting. He seems to deflect this responsibility by calling upon Rob to help them. Interestingly, Rob declines this request by saying, "even if I did have an 'outfit' and a phone booth unfortunately I do not think I can rescue you from this one". Nevertheless, rather than leaving them completely stranded in their helpless floundering, Rob does reiterate Natasha's question

which is to ascertain “what do we need to do?” His post is couched in action language – encouraging them to “push”, “explore”, “make some ground”, and “keep this going”. Rob seems to be drawing their attention to the need to act and move to get out of this floundering – even though this movement is centred in dialogue and conversation. On the other hand, Natasha seems to believe that “what we are talking about” will “move us to a point”, suggesting the performative aspect of words and conversation to move the group.

Key questions and summary

The discourse entitled “floundering” captures a state of being for some participants in which they are struggling with movement: they may feel like they are going around in circles, or stumbling along in surges. It leaves participants feeling quite lost about the direction and destination they perceive they should be heading towards. Some are racked with a sense of helplessness and call upon the facilitators to show them how to move and where to move to. Importantly, floundering is a relational phenomenon that is created in interactions with others, and therefore requires people to alter how they are interacting in order to escape from it. This need to alter individual and collective identities may be what makes it such a difficult process. It seems that participants need to lead or act their way out of floundering; however, there seems to be a reluctance or inability to act – participants talk about what they should do or need to do rather than doing it. It appears to be a demotivating and draining experience which provokes some participants to question whether they can continue in the programme.

The Emerald cluster’s interactions raise a number of questions about floundering. Firstly, why are the participants unable to escape from floundering even when they have received help from the facilitators? Building from this, how can those involved in development deal with participants’ calls for help, and ensure that they retain a sense of engagement and ownership in their development? Secondly, if inaction is a contributing factor to being

trapped in a floundering state, how can participants move from talking about doing to actually doing in a programme which is structured around online dialogue? Thirdly, is negotiating the state of floundering a crucial leadership challenge, and therefore a necessary stage in leadership development? If leadership is about creating movement and possibilities, and floundering is a draining inability to move, then undertaking leadership in this state is perhaps most needed, but most difficult to enact. How then do programmes provide such a development opportunity which floundering potentially offers in a way that does not result in participants withdrawing or “checking out”? Lastly, if one of the reasons that floundering is collectively created is due to individuals not feeling challenged or “shaken up” enough, how can this be fostered? Another suggestion to release participants from floundering is to play with different identities, a discourse I now turn to.

Undoing Discourse 3: Being Playful

The idea of being playful refers to undoing a fixed identity by moving between various identities. This discourse assumes that identity is multiple, fluid, and able to be experimented with in order to create a different energy and impact in an interaction. It is a form of undoing and identity work favoured by the facilitation team; yet the participants seem to have difficulty adopting it. Some participants appear reluctant to take up the invitation to be playful with their identity, whilst others ignore or deflect it, and some promote it.

I have chosen interactions that include other voices and observations rather than relying upon one account. I am reluctant to focus upon one person's account of their identity work as I acknowledge it is a relational and interactional phenomenon requiring action. To rely upon an individual's retelling of their identity work in a situation provides only one perspective, and I would prefer to contrast this perspective with what others' saw – or in some cases, what I observed. The table below captures a selection of the facilitators' phrases which refer to this idea of being playful with one's identity.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• experiment being something else• repertoire• we are “a parliament of selves”• adaptable• activate and animate• carry multiple identities• to change others, change who you are being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ability to choose to bring different identities• you are not “stuck” in one way of being• being fluid and responsive• get playful• try on a different identity
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The language above suggests that the facilitation team holds a post-modern/constructionist perspective of identity and identity work which encourages participants to experiment and play with multiple, different identities. The facilitators are interested in undoing the belief that an individual is “stuck in one way of being”, and instead offer the idea of being playful where that means having a “repertoire” of identities one can activate, animate, and

experiment with. Individuals seem to be perceived as agentic (“ability to choose”), who are able to hold multiple identities they can move between (“adaptable”, “responsive”). These multiple identities seem to lie dormant in some people, and identity work is a matter of “activating” them. Furthermore, it seems to be assumed that by changing one’s own identity this will change others.

A collection of data: Shorter interactions

I now turn to three interactions between facilitators and participants which illuminate this idea of playing with multiple identities. The first table recites a truncated version of the “identity work” session I observed at residential 3. This session was led by the facilitation team for over an hour, so the data contained below is only a small section of this session.

Shorter interaction 1

On the first day of the residential, the participants gather in a room along with the facilitators for a content session on “identity work”. One of the facilitators, Leah, conducts this session. The participants sit around on couches and cushions, as Leah explains what identity and identity work mean. During the session, Leah proposes, “If you can carry multiple identities, you have multiple options. As a leader, you need to be able to do a whole host of different things, in order to do this you need a different identity, a whole repertoire of action.” She goes on to say that “change is about getting new identities to add to a repertoire. You can keep identities and add new things. Whatever you are now, you can be more.”[...]

One of the other facilitators, Cassandra, adds, “You can be a lead-from-the-front person at home but not at work: why can’t you bring that person in? Already have lots of genuine and authentic people who you are, why can’t I create the space to bring in another identity.” Leah adds, “You’ve already got a lot of identities, it’s about animating selves you already have.” She suggests that “corporate organisations give rules about what identities you can bring”. This is contrasted with identity work because “the beauty of identity work is the option of having infinite space.” [...]

Shorter interaction 2

This next interaction occurred online between a facilitator, Rachael, and one of her cluster members, Raymond, during intersession 3 (almost a year into the programme).

Rachael: Ok so that's a strong statement about what you are and what you aren't but if you are going to be an adaptable leader who can change to be able to respond to situations which require you to be different then you being as you describe yourself above isn't going to work all the time is it? This is a story you are telling yourself.....so here is an experiment for you, what other identity could you bring to this cluster stuff for the next 15 days Raymond? Something that challenges the story you have about yourself and might mean that you can impact the cluster work in an entirely different way?

Raymond: Hi Rachael, thanks for your valuable comments. It is certainly one of my identities to try and be "the problem resolver" and in my mind I love ticking off tasks. To challenge this identity, over the next couple of weeks I will experiment with asking more and more questions of everything and trying not to finalise and find all the answers.

Below are a selection of Raymond's comments made in the days following the above interaction:

Raymond: You are so true about the fact that we are all so worried about people's perception of us and how they might judge us. I certainly am at times.
I also agree with your statement saying that you don't perceive people as harshly as you think they do you (if that makes sense).

Raymond: Proactively changing one's identity in order to relate to others, to get what you want, is storytelling.
Changing one's identity proactively is storytelling and can be used very manipulatively.

Shorter interaction 3

The final online interaction below comes from a longer discussion between Leah (facilitator) and Diane (participant). This interaction occurred during the first intersession of the programme.

Leah: Your story is about becoming "a baker" [...] if you weren't a baker then who would you be in your leadership? [...] I'm interested in the other Dianes who might like to experiment with the kinds of leadership that aren't about being a baker?

Finally it occurs to me that you might be being a baker with Jeff, Jeremy, and Jimmy.....that you are the one who makes the connections between them, who helps explain each one to themselves and others, who finds the flavour and taste that builds people up in this cluster so they feel good about being here, who works hard at bringing people into conversation and this space. There's not even the hint of criticism here.....you do so in gentle, beautiful prose which offers so much to everyone here.....but I guess my killer question is whether you need the space to experiment being something else additional (not necessarily instead of) to being a baker....because in order to be that then you may have to ask others to hold and work the dimensions that are important enough to construct you as a baker eh?

So what space would extend and challenge and stretch your leadership here and who do the others need to be to enable you to spend time in non-baking places?

Diane: [...] Being a baker is definitely safer... It's tried and true. You have a finite number of specific ingredients with which you take chronological steps towards a preconceived outcome. You keep your eyes on the watch and follow instructions then you can't go wrong. I

can see myself being a baker with a handful of specialities within my own territory and because I've done it so many times before I can do them with my eyes closed – that represents various facets of my life, it forms my routine and my relationship with others. On the other hand, if, as you suggest, I might extend myself and stretch my leadership to become a cook (and a good cook, is what it really takes for one to become a master chef – a leader), that would require me to step outside my comfort zone, letting life run its course and just see where I end up.

Being a cook entails letting nature determine for itself what it wants to be. Each ingredient ripens and matures at different times and I can't have full control over them. It actually requires a lot more skill and vigilance than baking, and as hard as you might try, you could still end up with an entirely different kind of dish altogether. What use is a dish that turned out to be different to how we first imagined it? Do we throw it out? Do we succumb to hunger and eat it anyway albeit reluctantly? Or do we give it a new name and celebrate the birth of a new dish? I think the challenge in leadership for me is to practise taking the latter path more. [...]

So it actually makes me completely relieved to hear I am still in a baking mode with you lot.... I think I got a bit sidetracked there because upon reading your post again there Leah, I think you were talking about an entirely different quality of a baker! [...]

These interactions contain a number of assumptions about this playful form of identity work.

The first is that an individual can have multiple identities that are held in a wider repertoire and can be accessed and “animated”. According to Leah, the advantage of having multiple identities is that it gives one “multiple options” and may create “infinite space”. Leah demonstrates this assumption of multiplicity in her interaction with Diane, as she pluralises Diane's name (“other Dianes”) and invites her to “experiment” with these other identities. This ability to be “multiple” is necessary in order to be an “adaptable leader” who can “change to be able to respond to situations which require you to be different”. The facilitators also assume that by changing one's identity, a person can create change in others and allow them “more scope”.

Who are these different selves that are encouraged to be “activated” and “experimented” with? Rachael suggests to Raymond that he needs to “experiment” with bringing an identity that “challenges the story you have about yourself” in order to “impact the cluster work in an entirely different way”. Raymond appears to interpret this as choosing the opposite to what

he is: going from a “problem solver” to a questioner who is more tentative and inconclusive. There are hints here of encouraging a shaking up type of identity. Another facilitator, Cassandra, suggests that the participants should introduce their non-work selves to their working context (“why can’t you bring that person in?”).

Another assumption about being playful is that for one person to be different in their identity, the people around them will need to be different too. Leah’s posting to Diane and her cluster addresses this as she asks the group, “who do the others need to be to enable you to spend time in non-baking places?” This question seems to be met with silence by the participants. Diane’s post does not seem to address it, and only one other participant responds to this post; however, they seem to validate Diane’s “baker” identity and suggest that she does not need to change. Leah in a subsequent post poses this question again, to which no participant replies. This suggests that although identity work has to be verbalised, it is perhaps difficult to really talk about it.

The interactions also point to the difficulty of being playful. Raymond accepts the facilitator’s request to be different and says he will “experiment with asking more and more questions of everything and trying not to finalise and find all the answers”. However, his following posts do not seem to exhibit this behaviour. In one he agrees with generalised statements one participant makes and exclaims “you are so true”. This does not seem to be the questioner identity he suggested he would become. In the second posting, he offers two statements which sound like finalised opinions (“changing one’s identity proactively is storytelling and can be used very manipulatively”). Again, this does not appear to be the identity which holds off from making finalised claims or “answers”. Perhaps his difficulty with being an opposite identity (i.e. from solver to questioner) is that he believes that changing one’s identity is “manipulative” and used to “get what you want”.

Diane's response to Leah gives some clues as to why she is reluctant to or uncomfortable with taking up Leah's invitation to play with her leadership identities. In her response to Leah, Diane describes her baker identity with words like: "safer", "tried and true", "chronological steps", "perceived outcome", "can't go wrong", "specialities", "my own territory", "my eyes closed", "eyes on the watch", and "routine". On the other hand, she describes the cook identity as: "outside my comfort zone", "letting nature determine for itself what it wants to be", "see where I end up", "can't have full control", "skill and vigilance", and "you could still end up with an entirely different kind of dish altogether". Being a cook seems to have an unpredictability about it: she cannot control the outcome – regardless of how vigilant she is – and she is unsure what to do with an outcome that she had not predicted ("throw it out?" "eat it anyway?"). Given such a contrast, Diane feels "completely relieved to hear I'm still in baking mode with you lot". Even though she does not explicitly say why she is glad to be in this mode still, it could be inferred that having described the cook identity as uncontrollable, risky, and unknown she feels comforted knowing she is not in that place. She appears to talk herself out of the opportunity to experiment with her identity. The next interaction between Diane and Leah offers more detail about her hesitation to play with her identity.

Extended interaction 1: Diane

The following data capture an online interaction that occurred in the Ruby cluster's forum. I pick up the interaction after a participant, Diane, has written a transcript of a meeting where two of Ruby's participants were present (Jeremy and Diane), alongside non-programme (Richard) and programme people (Rachael and Oscar). The discussion was around an external network organisation ("NWK") which all parties – except the facilitator – are involved with. Leah writes a posting reflecting upon the identity dynamics she sees in the transcript of the meeting, focusing on Diane and Jeremy. As a matter of context, prior to this

meeting, Diane's cluster had assigned her a different identity to enact: the challenger. This is in contrast to her "mother" identity which she seemed to adopt in the first few months of the programme (as alluded to in "shorter interaction 3" above).

Leah: I think there's a way of talking to identity work that isn't like talking in code and looking at all weird (as admittedly you do at times in this transcript). I also think you are staying stuck because you are talking identity seemingly as opposed to being who you collectively need to be in order to progress your identity work. [...]

So when I read the transcript...which is easy retrospectively and from a distance I know.....I see spaces in it in which you could have seized something to get you started.....and I wonder if the identities who could do the seizing, moving and starting...just haven't been given permission to come in and be active yet? Talk of Identities are just a way of activating a new kind of energy and approach to try out that's all.

Diane: You've picked up on something that I failed to notice at the time (and it surprises me sometimes how difficult it is to see ourselves) of my own behaviour in that conversation (and perhaps that of Jeremy, but he may have a different opinion). There wasn't any intentional omission in the process of transcription on my part to make Jeremy and myself seem mute in the conversation. I found myself observing and taking in a lot of what everyone else (and especially Oscar) had to say because I was more interested in where the conversation was going without my intervention AND I wasn't actively playing the role of the challenger. I can see how the conversation might have played out slightly differently if I played a different identity and threw in a handful of killer questions as well, but I think I still wasn't ready. I don't know why I had the hesitation, but to be completely honest I don't know if I could play that role now even if I was planning on it. I am a little scared, a part of that is a bit of scepticism and self-doubt of whether I can do it, but part of me is waiting to see some kind of validation that I can get away with it. This soft, safe bubble of [the programme] has made me a little lazy about externalising what I am internalising. [...]

So... the challenge for me is to figure out what it is I have to do to be more of a stirrer, troublemaker, challenger instead of this peace-loving, nurturing, sensible self.... it's so hard!

This interaction could be read as the difficulty in transitioning from talking about doing identity work to actually doing it. Leah notices in the transcript that Jeremy and Diane were presented with a "fantastic space" where "different identities could have come in"; however, it appears that they responded with silence. Leah models the voices of various identities that could have spoken at that time. She suggests that enacting one of these different identities would make the group move ("make something happen") as they offer "a new kind of energy". Leah suggests that perhaps what needs to happen to get them moving in their

identity work is to “give permission” to the identities which “could do the seizing, moving and starting”. Diane’s response provides some insights into why she did not leap.

Diane says she “still wasn’t ready” to enact the challenger identity as she doubts whether she “could play that role”. She is “a little scared” due to her “scepticism and self-doubt of whether I can do it”. Interestingly, she says “part of me is waiting to see some kind of validation that I can get away with it”. It’s not clear how such validation would look, or from who this validation is needed. She says that the “soft, safe bubble” of the programme has made her “lazy” about “externalising what I am internalising” which suggests that the programme has made her more comfortable thinking rather than expressing or doing – it has held her back from “seizing, moving, starting”. However, given the existence of agitating discourses such as “shake up” and “cut apart” it seems strange that Diane describes the programme as “soft, safe”. It seems that Diane has constructed the programme to fit into her description – and therefore it is perhaps inaccurate to claim it is the programme that has made her “lazy” without acknowledging her responsibility here. She retreats back into this thinking mode as she says she needs to “figure out what it is I have to do” to be more of a challenger.

There is one participant, Alistair, who says he has been consciously experimenting with his identity in his workplace. The next interaction recounts Alistair’s description of this identity change. I follow this with an interaction with Alistair that I observed at a residential.

Extended interaction 2: Alistair

I now turn my attention to another participant, Alistair, who along with his other cluster members spent a considerable amount of time on the programme focusing on his identity and identity work. The first data table is from a posting he made to his online cluster forum, and describes the experiments he has been doing in his workplace. This notion of the experiment was an activity that the facilitation team set up for all participants to complete. Within each

cluster, the participants had to collectively find a “leadership edge”, which was something unknown yet curious about leadership they all wanted to experiment with in order to understand further. Alistair’s cluster (Garnet) chose the following as their edge:

How does a person do leadership [with] multiple conflicting identities while still claiming to be authentic and genuine? What internal and external tension can this create?

Therefore, Alistair’s group intentionally wanted to play with multiple identities. I follow this table with an interaction I observed at a residential.

[...] Fortunately I have an employer who is really happy for me to engage in this type of experimentation and is also very adept at reading what identity and traits the people we work with bring into the room. So usually, before an important client interaction where [my boss] and I want to make something happen, we’ll talk about who best I [could] ‘be’ in the interaction in order to be as effective as possible whilst making space for the client relationship to happen - the net result that we’re always aiming for is the best strategic outcome for the client’s organisation which involves a unique balance of getting the right ideas in the mix, even if they are hard to swallow, and getting the client to buy in and own the idea so we don’t hit roadblocks down the road in the relationship, and so the client doesn’t abandon the strategy when we’re not around. [...]

- **Geek:** Built credibility with someone with someone typically hard to get onto the good side of, not a people person etc. but needed for buy-in in order to generate momentum at organisation.
- **Mentor:** I needed a way in order to sit in a room and convince someone of a fairly dramatic shift in their communication strategy for an upcoming funding round taking place in Australia. Taking on the same modality I would mentoring someone in public speaking allowed [me] to “mobilise the wise” in such a way that I felt comfortable in conveying the ideas with an authority that I wouldn’t typically be able to generate when working with someone so much farther up in social hierarchy, education, experience etc.
- **President:** We had a troublesome member of a team at the client’s who was pushing us around a little bit and so I tried (after a discussion with [my boss]) to be the person I would be if it was more like a club that was I was presiding over, didn’t work well in this instance but it was kind of a last jab. Presidential Alistair tends to rely upon robust logical arguments it seems which doesn’t pan out as well with people who typically engage more emotionally.

So that’s kind of how it’s been going for me, mobilising the parts of myself that I typically express elsewhere in my life and seeing how I can use them to affect my relationship capital and influence in my work. I’m going to continue doing this with clients – I’m excited about trying out the **mentee** identity with someone to see if that kind of crazy role reversal encourages them to be so bought into my work that they can never say no as well as being kind of “proud” of the outcomes. Will need to find the right client for it though. 😊

Observation of Alistair

The observation below concerns an interaction from the fourth residential between Alistair, his cluster, and some external guests.

The Garnet cluster (which Alistair is part of) sit around a boardroom table, alongside three guests they have invited to join in a discussion about their “leadership edge”. The cluster opens the conversation by talking about their interpretation of identity and their identity experiments. Alistair says to the guests, “we really really want you guys to test us, to push back on us”. After each group member described their “identity tensions”, Alistair talks about his experiments [as outlined in the previous data table].

One of the guests, Ron, a grey-haired, white male who has extensive experience in senior executive positions, is sitting opposite Alistair, and seems to look primarily at Alistair when he says, “all I hear is a lot of inward talk. You’re constraining yourselves by needing to label who you are. I don’t understand why you’re so concerned with trying to describe your identity. What is the relevance to leadership? Leadership is about being outward focused. I mean, who really feels this tension? I never have. I don’t have discussions about it, I charged on and was OK. You need to be authentic, confident in who I am, not care what others think – within boundaries.”

Alistair replies, “If you change yourself, you give others the opportunity to change, you can change them, get them to agree, change their paradigm. I think about how I am in other contexts and how I can be that in another context”.

Ron responds, “How are you going to know which one is the right one if you’re meeting a stranger? You need to focus on them, listen to them, rather than focusing inward on yourself.” He asks, “I mean, what the hell’s the difference between Alistair the Geek and the other ones? You have core values that don’t change. Leave yourself outside the door and go in and listen. Focus on the other person, not yourself.”

For the remainder of this conversation, Alistair is silent.

Later that day, the cluster members have a conversation, which is audio-recorded. Alistair describes how he “took the flak” in the meeting, to which the others respond, “he picked on all of us, he was talking to all of us”. Alistair says, “he [Ron] was telling me I don’t listen and I’m inwards focused. It was complete bullshit. I tried to say it wasn’t the case. It would’ve been really awesome if someone else said, no Alistair isn’t like that”. The others mention how Ron was “challenging you” because “he thought you were up for it.” They suggest to Alistair, “you took it personally, you need to let it go”, and “you’re choosing to react that way”. Natalie remarks how she had to “change who I was being in that moment”. Alistair describes the group as trying to get to the top of the mountain but in different ways. He is “climbing up the ice wall” on his own while “you guys got the chair lift together”.

Later that day I talk with Alistair about how he thought the meeting went. He expresses how he did not learn anything from the conversation, nor changed his thinking about their leadership question because “I couldn’t tell my story. It was pointless.”

Alistair's online assignment suggests he has taken on the language of being playful. He talks of "mobilising other identities" (which harks to the "activate and animate" language), and how changing identity can change "relational interactions". He portrays himself as quite agentic as he chooses what identity he would like to "mobilise". He believes that he is comfortable with holding a range of multiple identities (although at times he talks more about roles). He also seems to adopt a lot of business acumen, "buy-in", "generate momentum", "net result", "relationship capital", "strategic outcome", and so on, which suggests he is adept at internalising discourses.

Alistair's online posting raises questions about the purpose and consequences of doing this playful form of identity work promoted by the facilitators. On one hand he seems willing to tie his identity work to the goals of his organisation. He hopes that "mobilising other identities" will enable him to "be as effective as possible", to get "the best strategic outcome", and to get "client buy-in". Using the "best" identity will hopefully mean that he does not "hit roadblocks down the road in the relationship", and that the "client doesn't abandon the strategy when we're not around". His identity work therefore hopes to secure some degree of control, success, and certainty when dealing with clients. On the other hand, Alistair seems to want to gain some prestige, credibility, and authority through his identity work. He chooses roles of power and expertise (President, Mentor, Geek) in his dealings with some people who he admits are "further up in the social hierarchy, education, experience". He admits he wants to use his identity work to "affect my relationship capital", gain some "influence", and encourage someone to "be so bought into my work they can never say no".

The interaction I observed shows the contradictions in Alistair's talk and action, suggesting that although he speaks the discourse, it does not entirely translate in practice. The observation offers a different version of Alistair's claimed ability to "mobilise identities" to

be the “best I [can] be in the interaction”, as he seems unable to “dial up” different identities a) in the moment, and/or b) in scenarios which are unpredictable, and/or c) when he does not have the guidance of a boss-like figure.

Alistair began the session by openly inviting the guests to challenge him – which one certainly did. The guest’s questions and statements seem to be valid, and I am curious as to why Alistair found them so confronting when he has spent months investigating this “edge”. Faced with this challenge, it appears Alistair became quite fixed and stuck. It could be argued that Alistair is more fixed and rigid than his “mobilising” language suggests. Perhaps this is because he was faced by someone who had not “bought in” to him and was “say[ing] no”, who was challenging his credibility and expertise – which based on his online post are responses he hopes his identity work will eliminate. Perhaps Alistair’s repertoire of identities could expand to include a more humble, resiliently curious learner identity, as it may have prevented him from shutting down.

Because he shut down, Alistair’s ability to learn from this experience seems to have been limited. His comments afterwards that it was “bullshit” and “pointless”, and that his edge has not altered, points to this. It appears that his way of coping with the interaction was to be disappointed in his cluster for not standing up for him. This makes him feel like a “lonely” climber traversing an ice wall. He seems unwilling to address his responsibility for his responses to the interaction. Why does he seem to be perturbed that the group did not stand up for him? Perhaps these responses are fuelled by shock and hurt, and conceal learning that he has achieved; however, it is interesting to note that Alistair did not continue to talk about his identity work in his assignments and postings subsequent to this residential.

This interaction also intimates the difficulty of using the facilitator discourse with non-programme people, especially when the participant is restricted in their ability to enact the

behaviour of the discourse rather than just speak it. The contrast between the online data and observation shows the contradictions that can occur in describing and being playful, and suggests the importance of not relying on an individual's single story of their identity work, but rather adding researcher observations of in situ identity moments, and/or other people's versions of events.

Key questions and summary

It seems that one of the main undoing discourses promoted by the facilitators assumes that identity is multiple and fluid, and therefore that identity work involves playing with different, and at times contradictory, identities in order to bring a different energy, movement, and impact to an interaction. Furthermore, identity work is framed as highly relational and therefore it requires other people to be not only cognisant of other people's identity work but also their own. The data I have used in this section suggest that participants respond in a variety of ways to this call to experiment with different identities: some accept it and say that they will experiment – yet their behaviour in observed interactions indicates that they are struggling to enact it in situ. Other participants appear reluctant, uncomfortable, and potentially scared of experimenting. A number of questions are raised from these findings.

My first set of questions centre on the assumptions of this “playful” discourse. A critically orientated question would challenge the assumption that participants should bring their non-work selves into their workplace. Such a proposition seems to advocate what some critical writers have called the corporate colonisation of the self (Casey, 1995), and attempts to embed the individual's identity into the productive fabric of organisations (Rose, 1999). One participant, Alistair, seems to take on this suggestion as he consults with his employer about which identity he should be in a client meeting. On the other hand, it may be that some developers see this proposition as an emancipatory form of identity work as individuals can

release themselves from constraining work identities by illuminating their non-work identities. So one question here is do leadership developers – especially those purporting to use a constructionist or critical philosophy – have a responsibility to question this proposition when advocating it to participants?

The facilitators' discourse also seems to assume that an individual has a large amount of agency in their identity work: they can play, animate, and experiment with a varying number of identities. I wonder if this assumption needs to be tempered with an exploration of the structural, historical, and social norms and expectations which can impact on one's identity work. Such a discussion may speak to those participants who seem to be struggling with doing their identity work in practice – especially in different discursive contexts like their organisation.

A further empirical question surrounds whether the facilitators enact the identity work discourse they promote to the participants. Such an investigation could reveal a number of contradictions. If facilitators do not appear to be flexible, playful, and experimental in their facilitation identities, this may link with the struggle participants seem to be experiencing regarding enacting (rather than talking about) their own identity work.

Another set of questions relates to the participants' responses to the facilitators' discourse. I am curious as to why many of the participants seem silent when facilitators implicate who the “others need to be” in another individual's identity work. There seems to be an avoidance amongst some participants regarding identity work, which would be interesting to explore further as it may challenge the assumption that leadership development programmes are identity workspaces (G. Petriglieri, in press).

If we accept that some participants are more comfortable talking rather enacting the identity discourse promoted on the programme, a critical theorist would ask whether leadership

development programmes are building an individual's discursive repertoire or language but not their ability to implement the actions of the discourse. If this is the case, what are the implications of this kind of leadership development? The case of Alistair suggests the fragility of these individuals as they may shut down when their identity language is challenged. Diane's description of the programme as a "soft, safe bubble" that has made her "lazy" about "externalising" what she is "internalising" seems to speak to this concerning image of leadership development. At the same time, Diane's comment could be seen as an attempt to avoid or deflect her choices and behaviours.

Finally, Alistair's case also raises questions about the intentions behind being "multiple". What are the consequences of leaders doing identity work in order to constrain the actions and responses of people they interact with? (i.e. Alistair says he wants people to be unable to "say no" to him, or to "abandon" his strategy). What are the consequences of developing this kind of leadership identity which seeks control, power, and authority?

CHAPTER 7

Negotiating the Fine Lines of Identity Agitation

This chapter is concerned with two discourses of undoing that involve different degrees of identity unsettling and agitation. The process of having one's identity "shaken up" seems to be a more exciting and rewarding experience, as it is less violent in its execution. On the other hand, being "cut apart" speaks to moments where one's identity feels threatened, fragmented, or dissolved and is therefore a more painful and debilitating experience. Two metaphors indicate the difference in these discourses: shaking up is likened to the gentle shaking of a snow dome; whereas being cut apart is likened to the effects of throwing a grenade.

Undoing Discourse 4: Being Shaken up

The unsettling and disrupting of leadership knowledge and identities represents a more energising experience of being undone and appears to be a vital part of this leadership development programme. The table below captures some of the words and phrases indicative of this discourse.

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| • question each other and shake things up a bit | • the settling and the chaos |
| • turned upside down | • dismantle |
| • one of those Christmas snowmen in a glass dome that you shake up | • pushing the boundaries |
| • disoriented | • muddled up |
| • sick to my stomach | • thinking in some different ways |
| | • all mixed up |
| | • deconstruct |

The language above gives the sense that shaking up involves agitating the way in which people think and interact. Language such as "muddled", "mixed" and "upside down" portray a sense of disarray and disorder. It seems to be a relational process involving questioning and dismantling some boundaries and mindsets. This can feel bewildering, disorienting, and

energising. The metaphor of shaking up a snow dome ornament seems to capture the feel of this movement most eloquently, and suggests a rhythm involving the chaos of agitation and the calm of settling. The next section provides slices of talk from participants in online forums.

A selection of data: Online talk

I start this data table with a series of comments made in the evaluation survey of the first residential. The survey included a question about how effective the first residential was in its attempt to “disrupt and shake up existing notions of leadership”, suggesting that shaking up was one of the key intentions of the residential. I also include data from later in the programme.

Earlier in the programme
My thinking about leadership was well and truly shaken up. At one stage I found myself trying to almost forget every idea about leadership to try and build from scratch. (Anon, 1 st residential evaluation survey)
Sure shook me up. I felt sick to my stomach on Saturday afternoon. The not knowing or understanding really frustrated me. (Anon, 1 st residential evaluation survey)
The activities that were used to shake up our thinking around leadership brought our pod much closer together. (Anon, 1 st residential evaluation survey)
Things were definitely shaken up a few people were somewhat dis-oriented by the content. (Anon, 1 st residential evaluation survey)
I spent much of Saturday morning in a very very muddley space in my head - my brain felt somewhat like spaghetti with strands of thoughts and ideas all mixed up - which I found frustrating. This was particularly the case as I headed to lunch after filling my reflections page with question after question and not one concrete idea about leadership. As I sat down with my cluster after lunch, hearing each other’s ideas and having others shed light on some of my own questions the spaghetti strands seemed to unwind themselves and my ideas about leadership began to form more clearly (by NO MEANS crystal clear by the way!). But what I did realise was that I could be comfortable with some of my questions (particularly about space) left unanswered and that these did not have to get in the way or overly dominate my thinking about leadership. (Natasha, online post)
Later in the programme
What I found was that by asking these questions the whole thing just got turned upside down. I was absolutely unable to just look at things in the same way, these questions made that impossible. In asking these questions I came to some ridiculous conclusions that just were not in any way realistic BUT I also started thinking in some different ways that put forward some interesting possibilities. It seemed to me that there was no way I would have got to these possibilities by thinking about things in the same way we always had. (Ben, development

snapshot 1)

Then Rachael said something I'd NEVER heard of. She was aghast [at] the fact that I have "done" so many projects. I have to say, I had no idea what she meant at the time and till this day am still thinking about it. To me, what is leadership without projects??? I thought all leaders did projects. What else do you do? [...] So what was enlightening for me was that you guys caught me out, in the very [thing] I relish in doing, people get inspired I do... for F***ing sake, I even got an award to prove it haha. But this is brilliant. I finally feel like if I get this alternative way of being in leadership, something completely spectacular could come out of it. (Justine, development snapshot 1)

After Taupo I was feeling pretty crap to be quite honest. In fact on Weds I woke up feeling quite ill and not sure how I felt about all the new ideas that were floating around in my head. I had lunch with Savannah on Friday and she asked me how I was feeling and I realised that having a bit of distance from Taupo kind of allowed me to step back from being in the middle of all the theory and to kind of view it from a more distanced position. I don't feel so anxious that a. it has to make sense or b. that I have to do/think/believe anything I don't want to. When I let all that go I could kind of deal with the new ideas more logically and see them as part of a big whole. (Natasha, online post)

The deconstruction of my thinking which has been life-changing for me. I am loving the process and what I have learnt so far but I still haven't been able to fully put it all together. [...] It is chaos and unclear but what speaks to me is the fact that despite the chaos there are vibrant colours, lights and a disco ball. If you're going to be unclear this is a great and dynamic place to be! (Grant, development snapshot 1)

It seems that shaking up is incited by the disruption of the participants' beliefs and knowledge which leads them to hold an assortment of unanswered questions ("question after question and not one concrete idea about leadership"). This feeling of "not knowing or understanding" and having "all the new ideas ... floating around in my head" leaves some feeling "sick", "ill", or "disoriented". For others, the "deconstruction of my thinking" seems to provide an energy and enthusiasm ("despite the chaos there are vibrant colours"). One participant feels enlightened after having her leadership mindset and identity shaken up by a facilitator's question ("what is leadership without projects???"). She appears excited about the possibilities she can now explore, which could lead to "something completely spectacular", suggesting that shaking up can be a generative process in identity work.

The data suggest that connecting with other people is an important way to deal with the unsettling aspects of being shaken up. In both instances, Natasha starts to "unwind" after talking with other participants about her questions. She mentions how letting go of the

unsettling feeling has helped her “deal with the new ideas more logically”. There is also the sense that some participants struggle with the fragmentation which shaking up can create. Natasha says she feels less “anxious” once she realises that leadership ideas are “part of a big whole”, rather than needing to make sense of them individually. Another participant seems hesitant that whilst he is “loving the process” of deconstructing his thinking, he has not “been able to fully put it all together”, suggesting that he hopes this will happen.

Some participants hint at the chaos and settling rhythm of shaking up as after feeling “all mixed up” they start to become more comfortable with not having “concrete ideas” (“I could be comfortable with some of my questions ... left unanswered”). Natasha talks of feeling “very very muddley” but then she “sat down” and began to feel more clarity and comfort with her “unanswered” questions.

It is somewhat difficult to trace who is involved in shaking up. There seems to be some ownership taken by participants regarding doing their own shaking up (“I found that by asking these questions the whole thing just got turned upside down”). One participant, Natasha, also seems active in trying to move herself from “chaos” to “settling”. However, the facilitators still seem to have a presence in shaking up, as Justine describes how Rachael asked a question which “I had no idea what she meant”.

Metaphor of shaking up

This passage comes from a development snapshot which the participants were asked to write individually almost a year into the programme. The snapshot encouraged a form of reflective writing – a moment to halt and consider their development thus far and also their onward journey. Participants submitted the snapshot to the facilitators via the online platform and it was not visible to the other participants. The snapshot was structured around four questions. Ben’s response is to the following question:

“How would you describe where you have got to development wise given we are ¾ through the programme? Talk about how you are feeling about development, where you see your growth and learning and where you don’t, where you see boundaries and/or future potential, and what you have learnt/unlearnt about yourself in the process of the programme thus far.” Participants were invited to use metaphors, pictures, a story and so on.

De-con-struct

Tr.v. de-con-struct-ed, de-con-struct-ing, de-con-structs

- 1. To break down into components; dismantle.*
- 2. To write about or analyze (a literary text for example), following the tenets of deconstruction*

When I look at where I am in my development the one word that comes to mind is “deconstructed”. By this I mean that I feel like everything that I thought leadership was and everything I thought people wanted from a leader has been “deconstructed”. This is how I feel, and to be honest I am not sure how to put it all back together.

It is like I had almost finished a jigsaw puzzle and someone has come along and not only tipped it upside down but also replaced half of the pieces with different ones. The jigsaw has to be finished so you have no other option but to start again. No matter how much you want them to the old pieces that were replaced will not come back. Bugger!

I don’t see this as a negative though. I can absolutely see benefits in aspects of the thinking we have been introduced to and these discussions I think have led me to be more questioning and critical of things that happen around me. This deconstruction seems to have made me more aware. Exactly how this benefits me down the track I am not quite sure yet.

Ben describes how everything he thought about leadership has been “deconstructed”, broken down and dismantled. Ben places the responsibility of his dismantling on “someone” (not himself), as shown further in his verbs “introduced me” and “led me to”: he is “done to” rather than doing his own deconstruction. This “someone” has apparently replaced some of his identity pieces – they have been taken away from him, which portrays him as somewhat docile and powerless. This seems to be a hint of loss and yearning for the pieces – which seem to have an agency themselves (“will not come back”). While Ben seems to be struggling with the permanent loss of his old pieces, he appears to hold hope that he can create a different kind of puzzle. Ben believes that there are “benefits” to the upsetting of his jigsaw although he seems tentative, uncertain, and almost vague about what these are.

Ben seems to assume that he was whole, complete, an “almost finished” product. He seems to believe that his previous identity work has been annulled, reversed, and rewound, saying that he now must “start again”, as though he is back at the starting line. If Ben assumes that his identity work will reach a final end point (“the jigsaw has to be finished so you have no other option but to start again”) his work now is around putting these new, presumably mismatched, pieces “back together”, yet he admits, “I’m not sure how”.

Extended interaction: Shaking up in action

This interaction comes from a longer online discussion amongst the Emerald cluster and their facilitator Rob. It occurred approximately five months into the programme, almost two months after the second residential workshop.

Natasha: [...] I am really interested to know what others think - are you feeling challenged, satisfied, curious, frustrated or something else - what do you want to be feeling and how do you want us as a cluster to help you get to that point??? [...] I want to be challenged more - not necessarily challenged as in debated with over a finer point - although this of course is good! But, I want to pull open the discussions we are having and find them leading down another path - something that I haven't considered before perhaps [...].

The first response from a cluster member explained how they “just need to book in a time” to talk and that “we need to pick up the pace”. Another cluster member agreed that “we do need to put in more effort”. The third member didn't respond. Neither of the two participants addressed the points Natasha made but instead focused on arranging a time to talk on the phone or justifying their absence due to their busy work and life schedules.

Rob: *Natasha some questions for you?* Do you feel like you are often the motivator, the one asking the tough questions, the one who gets stuff kicking off? Have you actually become this team's surrogate facilitator and camp mum? Are you less busy? more committed than others? Why is it you that's filling this space? What does this mean for the others? Is there still space for them?

For the team: How do we work with these dynamics, how do we “choose” to come in and out of roles and bring others into spaces? [...] If your team was a boat who would be the sails, the captain, the rudder, the lookout? What would you be? how would you describe others? If I wanted the freedom to be able to choose my role on the boat and have this change and adapt regularly - how could I help make this happen?

Derek some thoughts for you... Derek you always seem like the busy man. Rushing here, rushing there. I will give a little bit here, a little bit there, spreading yourself thin? feeling stretched? wonder why you can't do more, impact more, motivate more? You simply just have not got the time in the day to meet all the commitments you make to others and to yourself. **What is the impact of all this on your leadership relationships?** How can you

spend time in a reflective practice (which includes doing this course) with so many in your face “right now!” immediate priorities to juggle? [...]

Lastly, I think development takes time eh! For me it’s like one of those Christmas snowmen in a glass dome that you shake up. We are doing some shaking and sometimes we can feel like all the bits are just overwhelmingly in our face and muddled up everywhere...it takes time for things to settle and sometimes it’s a beautiful thing – the settling and the chaos! ...I know we will all get some settling to do over Christmas and I am looking forward to more shaking and settling as we head towards the next residential. 😊

Derek: Thanks so much for the challenging reply. [...] I make the effort to make positive leadership relationships and I do not believe that my "busy" life has had a negative impact on this at all. In fact I think it has made it better for me. I always make time for these professional relationships and discussions when I can. Are you suggesting Rob that this course is not right for me? Or are you challenging me in a different way? Sorry if I took this the wrong way as emails and written words are hard to read. It is definitely not sustainable at all and if you have read my other posts I am VERY aware of this and have made positive changes!!

Natasha: [...] I am so pleased that you have asked these questions of me because I think part of the frustration I am feeling is that I feel like I need to kick-start everything - and I don't want to be in this position - in fact I really really don't like it. [...]

Rob: Hi Derek, thanks for checking the meaning behind the words. I am certainly not suggesting you are not active enough here or that you should not be on the programme at all - C'mon...I like you too much! 😊 [Rob then proposes three reflections/questions to Derek about his “busy” identity].

Derek: thanks Rob - just checking things out – that’s what I do haha - I like you too don’t worry buddy! [...] I am definitely willing to explore it at this level - please explain further though as I am not fully understanding 😊

This interaction can be read as the shaking of a “snow[man] in a glass dome”. It begins with Natasha calling upon her cluster to shake her up (“I want to be challenged more”). She seems to want this shaking up as it will provide her with different pathways, perspectives, and angles “I haven’t considered before”. However, her cluster members seem to deflect and diffuse her request as they do not engage with her questions but rather focus on logistical details about phone calls. It is their facilitator, Rob, who takes up Natasha’s call to be shaken up. His post seems to do this by asking a series of identity questions of Natasha and the other cluster members – in particular “busy man” Derek (i.e. “Have you actually become this team’s surrogate facilitator and camp mum?”). Natasha welcomes Rob’s shaking up attempts. She seems comfortable engaging with his questions and admits that she does not like the kick-starter identity she takes on in the cluster.

However, Derek seems defensive in his response to Rob, as he tries to justify his behaviour and neutralise Rob's observations. Derek seems affronted and as a result appears to jump to an extreme question, "Are you suggesting Rob that this course is not right for me?" This demonstrates how some people may feel confronted, vulnerable, and disturbed when their identity is shaken up, especially when they did not directly invite it.

Rob's reply affirms to Derek that "I like you", then proceeds to reword his reflections about Derek's "busy man" identity. Derek too starts with a declaration that "I like you too". He seems to thank Rob for his observations, but still does not give substantial elaborations. At one point he says that he is "willing" to explore one of Rob's reflections but asks him to "please explain further". It seems as though Derek turns Rob's questions back onto Rob without meaningfully engaging in them; Rob's questions seem to ricochet off Derek, diffusing their ability to shake him up in any enduring way.

This interaction also contains Rob's metaphor of development being similar to shaking up "one of those Christmas snowmen in a glass dome". This can feel "overwhelmingly in our face" and "muddled up", but it can sometimes be "a beautiful thing". Derek's response seems to hit this notion of feeling instantly "overwhelmed" by the shaking; however, he appears to go straight to settling, rather than enduring the chaos of shaking.

Key questions and summary

The gentle yet chaotic motion of shaking – and its accompanying settling – seems to provide participants with an opportunity to explore different ways of being and thinking in their leadership. The process of shaking up seems to be a relational one where participants may receive these actions from another person, and/or consult others to help them work through the "chaos". One of the questions that arises from this discourse is how do people put their "jigsaw" back together when it has been turned "upside down"? Also, after the chaos of being

shaken, does one settle back into the same place and identity: does the snow settle differently after being shaken?

How can development programmes try to build a form of shaking up that is a “beautiful thing” rather than a destructive, isolating, or debilitating process? If we take Derek’s response as any indication, then some participants may feel threatened, sensitive, and attacked by such attempts, which could cause them to withdraw. How can shaking up balance the tension between being sensitive and agitating?

Finally, it seems to me that this rhythm of shaking and settling could be the ideal movement for identity work in leadership development. It reminds us that incessant processes of undoing identity are not sustainable; rather, it needs to be balanced with moments of consolidation, relaxation, and stillness. Therefore, if we assume that shaking up is a vital leadership development experience, how can programmes build the participants’ capacity to engage in it? Where engage means: shaking up other people and themselves (so that it’s not the domain of the facilitators), absorbing rather than deflecting others’ attempts, and supporting themselves and others to work through the “chaos”? If we accept that participants can benefit from a form of shaking up, how can development deal with those participants who seem to deflect or ignore it? Are these people the most in need of some shaking? Why are they averse to it? Whilst I argue that participants could benefit from being shaken up, the next discourse, “cutting apart”, represents a form of undoing that is potentially more destructive for participants who engage in it.

Undoing Discourse 5: Being Cut Apart

Compared with the more gentle and benign “shaking up” discourse, being “cut apart” speaks to the disintegration, fragmentation, and destruction that some participants may experience in their identity work. The following table draws on language from the participants and facilitators, which I have grouped under the title “cut apart”.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• blowing everything to smithereens• cut apart• dissolved all my foundations• destruction• pulling you apart• push each other harder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• thrown off• fire away at me• throwing someone a shock• throwing a grenade• landmine• knife
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Firstly, being cut apart is linked with feeling like one’s identity has been disintegrated or fragmented (“dissolved”, “smithereens”, “apart”), and suggests an assumption that one’s identity is whole and complete. Being cut apart is likened to quite forceful actions such as “push”, “pull”, “throw”, and “cut”, and instruments such as a grenade, landmine, knife, and fire. These tools could be used to blow “everything to smithereens”, or in a less malignant manner, to give someone “a shock”. The risk of using such powerful language is that it can tend to quite extreme readings and interpretations. Therefore, whilst the seriousness of this language cannot be denied or diluted, I am weary of the temptation to make unjustified claims of wholesale destruction and violence.

A selection of data: Shorter interactions

The following data tables are slices of interactions both observed and online. They serve as illustrations of being cut apart and are followed by an analysis which looks across the three tables.

Interaction 1

Towards the end of the first residential, participants are asked to discuss in their cluster groups their reflections about the nature of leadership development – what they have felt, thought, and experienced this residential. One participant, Sally, says, “I feel like they’re blowing everything to smithereens. It’s shaken up everything I know, like I’ve been put in a tumble dryer.”

The clusters join back together as one large group and they are asked to share some of their reflections. Sally says, “I’m used to quantifying things, and I’m finding it really hard that I can’t quantify what I’ve learnt this weekend. I feel like you’ve dissolved all my foundations, I can’t cling to anything, things have been cut apart.”

A facilitator, Cassandra, replies, “I didn’t have a knife though.”

Sally responds, “You’ve told us to let go.”

Cassandra says, “But I’m telling you to hold on.”

Another participant, Savannah, who is also in Sally’s cluster, says, “It’s felt like I’m going backwards, going backwards to go forwards. It’s taken apart what I know, and I’m trying to be OK with that.” Cassandra tells the group this is not training, it is development. The difference is that “training is additive”, whereas development is “a willingness to deconstruct and challenge own thinking. We’re giving you a lot of handles to grab on to [...] development is your work, but we’ll be side by side with you and grapple with you”.

Interaction 2

On the second day of residential 3, I observe an interaction between a group of participants and one facilitator, Leah. The participants are lounging in a circle, trying to brainstorm different ideas for a project they are working on together. The following interaction occurs between Leah and a participant, Oscar.

Leah says to Oscar, “Why are you destroying ideas early?”

Oscar replies with a joke.

Leah responds, “Why did you take that to a joke?”

“I’m playing”, says Oscar.

“There’s play and there’s play though. Who are you?”

“Oscar.”

Leah asks, “Who are you being?”

Oscar replies, “An assassin. I’m killing it.”

The next day, after the residential is over, Oscar writes the following posting to the semi-private online “Ispace” – a forum only the facilitators and myself have access to.

“Things are pretty manic back at work. I think I am still coming down from/adjusting to the mind tweaks at the residential... Think I’m experiencing a bit of the same thing Robyn did on the last day, it’s strange aye.....Finding myself questioning who I am being, behaviours I am exhibiting & how I am to others much more. Some of the things I am perceiving & seeing I am not liking and it is quite unsettling.....Finding it a bit hard to tell whether this pain is from growth of my character or destruction of it or both. Maybe I am just tired, who knows but I feel like I have a lot to process and I am struggling to deal with it a bit.....”

Interaction 3

The following data are from an online response which a facilitator, Leah, makes to a participant, Aaron, regarding his “travel plan”.

It sounds like you want to know yourself a whole lot better...don't hand that responsibility of pulling you apart to someone else however.....that's fine for a start or a shock or a leap...but alongside that build the kind of reflective practice which means you can see yourself, catch yourself and build an ongoing practice of noticing the frames and thinking you use as you go about your living and leading. It's great to get input into how others are seeing you, but remember it's only one limited perspective in the end and that knowing yourself better is going to come from not just conversations like that but what you do with them.

I am struck by the violent nature of some of the language (“blowing everything to smithereens”, “cut apart”, “killing”, “assassin”, “destruction”, “knife”), which seems to indicate the turbulent, painful, and intense experience of being cut apart. The data suggest that what has been cut apart is the participants’ knowledge and how they are “used to” making sense of the world (“I’m used to quantifying things”). The dismantling of “what I know” can feel like a dissolution of one’s “foundations”, which one person extrapolates out to an overall agitation of their identity as shown in the use of the pronoun “I” (“I’ve been put in a tumble dryer”). In addition, the direct questioning of one’s identity in interactions seems to be another trigger. Oscar seems to have internalised the facilitator’s repeated questions about who he is being (“finding myself questioning who I am being”), and what is more, he realises “I am not liking” some of his identity. In the second interaction, the facilitator seems quite persistent in her questioning of the participant’s identity (“Who are you being?”). The participant seems to deflect or avoid the questions, but eventually acquiesces – and adopts this self-questioning as indicated in his online post.

The language in these interactions suggests that some participants assume they have a wholeness that has been shattered and fragmented (“cut apart”, “taken apart”), leaving them

with a collection of “smithereens” and “dissolved ... foundations”. Having one’s identity cut apart therefore evokes images of being dismantled, “dissolved”, and broken up. The participants also tend to talk in totalising terms – “everything” is blown to smithereens, “I can’t cling to anything”, and “all my foundations” are dissolved, implying the magnitude of how being cut apart feels. This suggests that some participants find it difficult for their identity to function as a “whole” when parts of it may be under threat.

The data also raise questions about the relational aspect of being cut apart. The use of pronouns in the first interaction suggests that participants may position themselves as the receivers of the actions of the facilitators (“they’re blowing everything to smithereens”, “I’ve been put”, “you’ve dissolved”, “you told us”) – or if not the facilitators, the vague pronoun “it” is used (“it’s taken apart what I know”), presumably referring to the residential workshop/programme. The ownership the participant takes is that they are left struggling to quantify (“I can’t quantify”) and cling to something (“I can’t cling”). They frame their behaviour as an inability to do something (“can’t”) or that they are “trying”, which hints that they are not quite able to achieve a desired state (“being OK”).

Therefore, it could be argued that the participant is “done to” rather than doing the cutting apart, which seems to be the domain of the facilitators. However, in the first interaction, the facilitator seems to pick up on this done to/doing dynamic, as they challenge the participant’s claim about being cut apart by saying “I didn’t have a knife”. The facilitator evolves this into a discussion that development is “your work but we’ll be side by side with you”, which is an attempt to reposition themselves from the antagonist holding a knife to more of a partner, an equal – and in doing so heightening the participant as more agentic and powered. In the last interaction, the facilitator warns the participant not to place the responsibility of “pulling you apart” in someone else’s hands.

The feeling of being cut apart leaves one participant struggling to “cling to anything”, whilst the other feels as though they should be more comfortable with what they have experienced (“I’m trying to be OK with that”). The facilitator counters this feeling by suggesting “we’re giving you a lot of handles to grab on to”. Oscar uses words such as “pain”, “tired”, “struggling”, “unsettling”, and “strange” to describe his experience. He hints at a sense of hope that this may be a positive opportunity, “growth”, rather than solely the pain of “destruction”. It is perhaps because of this hope of growth that some participants seem to desire being cut apart. The next section explores such invitations from the participants.

Online talk: Inviting being cut apart

Some of the participants seem to invite this process of being cut apart. The data below come from a range of postings made in online forums primarily during the second intersession.

<p>Maybe having got to know each other much better at [the second residential] it is time to stop being so nice and polite. By that I don’t mean rude but let’s push each other harder and hold each other accountable for getting the most out of this. That is definitely what I need. (Ben, online post)</p>

<p>So I am also going to put it out there that I want more from you guys. I want you to challenge me. But not in a negative way where it is confrontational but in a positive way where you influence my thinking to help me explore. [...] Do [you] accept the challenge??? [cluster members did not respond]. (Natalie, online post)</p>
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<p>How do we want to work going forward. Do we need to reframe how we work as a cluster? I don’t think we do completely. as I know that we are all enjoying our cluster so we don’t want to take that away but think we can definitely push each other harder. I think that the feedback we have got overall is that we probably need to challenge each other more (we are too nice). (Renee, online post)</p>
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<p>We will be doing each other disservice if we try and be nice. I think by you guys sharing your concern, you’ve created a space for us to acknowledge this unwelcome possibility. However, I also think because of who we are and why we are here... I’d be very surprised if it ever became that way. Let’s just keep each other on check with this. In saying that though, personally I love it when I’m good friends with ppl [people]. I feel like I can be even more open and honest. I’m a very straight shooting person so I feel like those who know this about me (i.e. my friends) won’t feel offended if I say things as it is. But I appreciate most people work opposite to me. So yeah just an open invite, fire away at me. You’ll be getting it from me :P (Justine, online post)</p>

<p>We’re all big-headed enough to tell ourselves when we’re on the right track. I want to be thrown off it from time to time and then get help to climb back on. (Anon, residential evaluation survey)</p>
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There is the sense that the participants wish to be receivers of undoing attempts. Some of the participants seem to invite and even demand (“I want”, “I need”) to “push each other harder”, to be “thrown off”, to “challenge each other more”, to be “straight shooting”, and to “fire away at me”. They seem to request the tumultuous and sharp forms of being cut apart (push, shooting, thrown, fire), which suggests that they are complicit in the process of establishing more forceful or violent forms of undoing and therefore are not mere victims. It strikes me that the participants seem to position being “pushed” as something that has to be done to them by someone else: self-undoing does not seem to be visible here. Only one participant acknowledges that she will be an active instigator rather than solely a receiver (“you’ll be getting it from me”). Furthermore, one person not only asks to be “thrown off the tracks” by another person, they also request that they “get help to climb back on” from other people.

It also appears that being “nice” and “polite” stands at an opposite pole to being cut apart: some participants issue an identity request to “stop being this” in order to become someone who can “challenge” and “push”. However, they caveat such calls to be “pushed” with a request that it is not “negative”, “rude”, or “confrontational”. It is unclear therefore how the sharp forms of pushing, throwing, firing, and shooting can be enacted.

Extended interaction: Throwing a shock

The following online interaction occurred towards the end of the first intersession (around three months into the programme). As I have truncated this lengthy interaction, some context is necessary. The interaction began with a participant, Justine, following instructions from the facilitators to identify a leadership question that she would like to work on with the help of the group at the upcoming residential. Justine’s question centred on how she could “infect the masses” with her ambition to eradicate global poverty. A facilitator responded to her with a posting that gave the dictionary definitions of “infect” and “masses”, and finished with the

question: “So ‘infect the masses’ has positive associations for you (has connotations of tyranny for me and I was tempted to look that up too)? And what exactly is simple about it?”

Another participant, Michael, replied to Leah with the post I have included below. I have focused on parts of the interaction between Michael and Leah (truncations are signified by [...]), and have not included Justine’s responses, or one other posting by a participant.

Michael:

Leah,

I am disgusted by your response. The purpose of this programme is to share and to grow as a group together. A person has asked for help as we were instructed to do and instead of replying in a positive and helpful manner you have taken a two word turn-of-phrase completely out of context and in a negative manner. I cannot believe that, in your role as a facilitator in this programme, you can think this is appropriate.

Read the post!! Understand what the context is and Justine is trying to say!! She is trying to share her passion and inspire others, not force change on them. Get over your dictionary and live in the real world! [...]

Finally can I say we are trying to create an open and supportive environment online where people feel safe to express their thoughts without reprisal. I feel your negative response is the antithesis of this.

Leah: [...] I went to a dictionary and gave her a number of phrases.....ranging from the most “negative” to the most “positive”.....that was an invitation for her to select what she really did mean. [...] going to a dictionary also gives one a shock at times.....as does taking a word out of one context and seeing it starkly in another.....as words contain traces of other meanings and words. I thought the shock would help her see her words in all sorts of ways that might help her stretch and refine and work with what she wants to do helpfully.

I accept there is a tension in being “open and supportive” and throwing someone a shock (a killer question is a kind of shock).....but my experience is that supporting one to grow and develop means risking getting a question or response from an uncomfortable place....and my reading was Justine had invited that and could cope with that. I could be wrong. From what I’ve seen, the clusters who haven’t been able to walk that tension might have felt safe and supportive but not particularly tested....and big shifts haven’t necessarily happened for them. [...]

I’d be interested in other responses...and quite happy to turn off making this sort of response entirely so we have your “open and supportive environment”there is loss and gain in any environment.....so you are quite right to lead us in the one you want. Keep doing it.

Finally I am quite happy to say sorry to anyone I offend and yes I can do things wronglybut would be sorrier if no facilitator had engaged with the notion of “infecting the masses”....we would deserve to be well out of a job if we couldn’t stand up and do that.

Michael: [...] Do I understand that you intentionally approached this post to elicit a strong response by writing something controversial? If so - well done! - you achieved your goal. But is this a high percentage way of developing people? I accept that often people need to go through feelings of discomfort to make change within their lives. But do you feel that in this instance it was well directed? My impression was that rather than “throwing a shock” you decided to throw a hand grenade and then see if there are any pieces to pick up at the end to re-form to your liking. [...]

Leah: [...] I don't set out to be controversial at all....so I must be an abject failure here in that I've done so....I set out to interrogate the realities we are bringing into this programme....because that's where mindset work happens. But you are right to question the force I brought to that.....my work is words (thinking of the work you don't see too much of in research, design and so on).... in a way that others work with machines, numbers, merchandise or services.....I need though to put that aside sometimes and work differently with you all.....that's hard because words are 3-dimensional for me.....they have colour, shape, feeling and energy.....they blaze a trail to where stuff like killer questions lurk. I don't use them though like hand grenades.....more like very precisely landmines.....but your correction of it is fair.

So I'm [making] an observation to round off (and not throw a hand grenade I hope)is that your first response reads with the energy, passion, anger and fury that my first response to Justine did. When I look back to my response, I see a whole chain of reactions set off by “infect the masses” that's personal, political, ideological and emotional that goes right to the heart of what I stand for and fight for. I suspect your protection of Justine and the power of supporting another might do the same for you. For both of us then we found a place of great fire and significance that could unleash such a reaction eh.....[...]

This interaction can be read as a facilitator “throwing a shock” to a participant – and another participant throwing one back to the facilitator. The “cutting apart” seems to be turned upon a facilitator. It is one of the only sustained online interactions in which a facilitator is thrown by a participant. The interaction begins with Michael reacting against Leah's response to Justine which he believes is “negative”, “[in]appropriate”, “out of context”, and “not well directed”. Such a response is “the antithesis” of what he believes the programme should be (“positive”, “helpful”, “open and supportive”, “without reprisal”, “share and to grow as a group together”). There is a clash here between Michael's expectation of the programme (which follows the “nice” and “polite” data from the previous table), and the “pulling apart” which some participants invite and this facilitator deems vital to a leadership development programme. For Michael, its presence is not welcome (“disgust[ing]” in fact) on his version of the programme.

Leah's rationale for her "throwing someone a shock" is that it provides opportunities for people to "stretch" and "refine", and causes "shifts" and "growth", which for Leah is fundamental to a leadership development programme ("we would deserve to be well out of a job if we couldn't stand up and do that"). It appears to me that Michael belongs to a cluster that has not "walked that tension" and therefore has not experienced "big shifts". This may partially explain his shocked response to Leah's post as his facilitator did not introduce this type of interaction dynamic.

Michael alters Leah's metaphor of "throwing a shock" by instead contending that "you decided to throw a hand grenade and then see if there are any pieces to pick up at the end to reform to your liking". Again we see the use of violent imagery to describe the facilitators, and the assumption that cutting apart involves the dismantling of a "whole" person into "pieces". He takes the metaphor further, referring to the moulding and refashioning capacity of the facilitators ("reform to your liking"), suggesting the manufacturing powers held by the facilitators – and the vulnerability or malleability of the participants. His use of "reprisal" also seems to frame the facilitator's actions in warfare terms: the word "reprisal" means "retaliation against an enemy, for injuries received, by the infliction of equal or greater injuries" ("Random House Dictionary," 2010). This suggests a relationship of enemy/ally: enemies, for Michael, inflict injuries (throw a grenade), whereas Leah would argue that allies do this as well "helpfully". Through his posts, it seems to me that Michael becomes what he criticised Leah for (throwing shocks), and is enacting his own version of "reprisal" against Leah.

The last posting from Leah in the above table provides traces of her own "cutting apart", as she appears to dismantle aspects of her facilitation style ("I must be an abject failure here", "you are right to question the force", "I need though to put that aside", "your correction of it is fair"). She seems prepared to let go "pieces" of her facilitation identity for this group

(“there is loss and gain in any environment”). I got the sense that the “passion, anger, and fury” of Leah’s online identity in this interaction was toned down in her online interactions with participants (except with her cluster group) for the remainder of the development programme.

This interaction alludes to the power and agency ascribed to words, and how cutting apart can happen through discourse. Michael’s initial “disgust” post seems to be incited by Leah’s interrogation of Justine’s words. This could be because he does not want to be held accountable for the words he uses (he says, “If there was to be a discussion about the appropriate use of terminology and that care is required when using certain words as they are open to discussion then I think it would be a discussion of value”). He appears to lash out at Leah’s use of a dictionary (“get over your dictionary”). Words therefore could be seen as a key trigger here for shaking up Michael. The word “disgust” has a sharp ring to it, which even Leah admits she is “not sure what to do with”, capturing the force contained in being cut apart.

This interaction can also be used to critique the invitations from participants to be “thrown off track”. Justine, in her posting, invited people to “Question me with what I believe so strongly in”, to which Leah responded (“my reading was Justine had invited that and could cope with that. I could be wrong”). However, it indicates that despite their invitations, participants are not able to “cope” with these “shocks”. It reflects a broader theme in the programme in which participants would be challenged and would often ignore or deflect it. Therefore, there seems to be a difference between the discourse and desire to experience being “thrown”, and their actions from some participants when confronted by it.

Key questions and summary

The data raise a number of questions about the process of having one's identity cut apart in leadership development. Firstly, I wonder why the facilitator in the first interaction seems uncomfortable with the identity of "holding a knife", when it appears that part of the philosophy of this programme is to "throw a shock" at times. Furthermore, the same facilitator seems to be present in the interactions I have chosen, and leads me to ask, what are the consequences of one facilitator having this identity and responsibility to throw shocks at the participants?

Secondly, I am curious as to why the participants do not seem to position themselves as "doing" this cutting apart of themselves: why is self-undoing not present in their experience? What are the consequences of relying upon or placing the "knife" in another's hands? Should development programmes be encouraging participants to perform this work, as well as – rather than solely – receiving it from others? Furthermore, how do developers navigate the tension between those who invite being cut apart and those who react in "disgust" at it? If participants do not want to be "nice and polite", but also do not want to experience confrontation, what kind of "pushing" do participants desire?

Lastly, there seems to be a larger set of questions surrounding the purpose and consequences of what could be seen as quite violent and tumultuous forms of identity work in this context. Is there an ethics of care (Gabriel, 2009) that goes with this undoing – both for those receiving it and those enacting it? What are the consequences of disintegrating and reconstructing one's identity in this powered context – especially if participants seem to need others to help them "back on track"? Does this material suggest that developers need to concentrate on building the capacity of participants to "re-form" themselves to their own liking – not someone else's? If we accept that internal pain, tension, and struggle is part of

doing identity work, how can development programmes best support this process in ways that bring the person to a point of growth, rather than destruction? Whilst participants position themselves as somewhat passive in this discourse, the next discourse, “letting go”, suggests that participants are more active and agentic in working with this form of undoing.

CHAPTER 8

The Hope and Fear of Discarding Identities

In this final data chapter, I present the two remaining discourses of undoing. These discourses are grouped together as they each deal with the experience of discarding aspects of one's identity. The first discourse, "letting go", was introduced (and therefore encouraged) by the facilitation team. Some participants seem to delight in taking up this invitation to drop parts of their identity, and are hopeful of who they can be at the end of this process. The second discourse, "slipping back", refers to the struggle some participants have to move on from identities, or aspects of identities, which they claim to have discarded. Participants seem to fear slipping back into "old" identities, and whilst this can be a productive emotion for some, it leaves others engaging in self-destructive talk if they do slip back.

Undoing Discourse 6: Letting go of Identities

Like being cut apart, the process of letting go aspects of one's identity can involve anxiety and loss; however, it can also be an energising and hopeful process. This discourse of "letting go" speaks to the process of discarding and shedding parts of one's identity. It would seem therefore to challenge the notion of development as solely an additive or accumulative experience. This discourse was introduced by the facilitators, and the participants subsequently engaged in it. The table below contains a collection of comments which relate to the experience of letting go aspects one's identity.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• giving up bits of self• I think the "tools" I'm holding could do with some dropping• I felt a large amount of loss• If I don't have my tools I'm not a fire-fighter | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I've got to let go of that engineer identity• who I am without that• you need to chuck that and leave it |
|--|--|

This data table introduces words such as “giving up”, “dropping”, and “chuck that” which are synonyms for this movement of letting go. The participants seem to have a willingness to let go aspects of their identities (rather than these being taken, grabbed, or snatched by someone else). Letting go therefore is not seen as a surrendering or relinquishing of identity to someone else; rather, there seems to be an intentionality and consideration in this process. For some participants they feel a sense of loss with this letting go, and others are uncertain about who they are without their “tools”.

A selection of data: Online talk

It seems that letting go was one of the themes of the first residential as the participants were asked a question about loss and gain in the evaluation survey. I have chosen to interpret talk about loss as fitting into this discourse of “letting go”. The residential evaluation survey asked participants:

If we asked you to think about this residential in terms of loss and gain (of what you held about yourself and leadership prior to it), then what might you have lost and gained as a result of these 3 days? How are you making sense of such a process?

A selection of participant responses is outlined in the table below. I also include two comments written by two participants in their final assignment at the end of the programme.

I think I have lost my set beliefs in regard to leadership. I can be fairly closed off and at times not open to debating something when I have made a decision on something. I think I have lost that quite a bit as I’m a lot more open to the learning opportunities offered by these discussions. As a result I have gained that ability to open myself up to learn and grow further.
I felt a large amount of loss on the Saturday, it was a loss of what I thought I knew. This soon changed to gain once I left throughout the Sunday and Monday, when I could start implementing changes and seeing positive changes. Life-changing big picture thinking for me.
I lost my preconceptions of what leadership is. I lost my fear of not knowing all the answers and gained working together to discuss and debate ideas. I loved it. I gained a self-awareness that is just beginning to emerge.
I lost all ideas I had about leadership - it was replaced with doubt, fear and excitement - what is next where to from here - I used a lot of these ideas on my first day back at work - it is exciting :)

Whatever I have lost, has been lost for good - to make more space for better things to take place.
Lost: my need to always show that I'm the one with the great ideas if I'm leading something.
I have lost my narrow view on the topic and gained some tools for understanding in the future. I gained the confidence to speak my thoughts and opinions out in a group. It seems only fair that you give up clarity and old habits and stubbornness to gain perspective and enlightenment!
Lost a confidence in my grasp on leadership and how I am a leader in my workplace.
To be honest I don't feel I have lost too much as far as my ideas about what leadership is, but feel that I have instead gained a new way to express and articulate these.
I think I gained a lot more than I lost, my pre-existing thoughts of leadership were fairly broad so there wasn't too much to "de-construct"
I think I have opened my mind to what leadership is really about - and have lost a bit of my thoughts that may have been holding me back in this space. I am more open to what is to come.
Comments from online written assignments
For me a really important part of this course has been the experience of loss. I have realized there are parts of myself that I have held very tightly, my identity as a doctor, my preconceived notions of myself, my place in the world and how I fulfilled that role. Part of the course for me has been learning to hold more loosely these concepts, to shed some of them and to find and mobilize other parts of my identity. I think this experience of loss has also allowed me to grow as a person. It is through loss of such tightly held beliefs that I have opened myself up to new ways of seeing and being seen. It has given me a sense of freedom, of opportunity and a willingness to change direction. (Abigail, final development snapshot)
At some point during this journey of exploring identity there was a profound sense of loss and fear resulting in this. I felt like I had lost everything I had known before and no longer had any recognisable points of reference - and I desperately scrambled to find these. I think that I went to a place that the [Catalyst] programme wanted me to go to - but I felt like I was in quite a dangerous place as I felt that I didn't have a strong support network around me. It made me resent the programme for putting me in that place as it was frightening. At some points I felt like I was being rewired - although it was all through my own thinking - no one was telling me how to think. I placed a huge amount of trust in the facilitators to help me to see where I was going but I didn't always feel that I had that support around me to help to see what was around me and to scaffold me through the places I needed to get to [...]. (Natasha, final development snapshot)

The participants mainly talk about the loss of knowledge, ideas, and preconceptions about leadership and themselves. Some participants also allude to letting go of ways of being (“the one with the great ideas”, “stubbornness”, “my place in the world and how I fulfilled that role”). Some participants frame loss and letting go as productive experiences (“I loved it”, “it is exciting”, “allowed me to grow as a person”) as it “makes space for better things to take place”. This could be because they are framing those ideas that are given up as “old habits

and stubbornness” and which need to be dropped in order to “gain perspective and enlightenment”. In letting these things go, the participants seem to gain “self-awareness” and “a sense of freedom, of opportunity and a willingness to change direction”. This idea of gaining enlightenment is picked up by another participant who assumes that the thoughts they have lost “have been holding me back” but now without them they are in a position to find out what “leadership is really about”.

There seems to be a need amongst some participants to feel and see positive gain as soon as possible (a “large amount of loss ... soon changed to gain”). They seem more comfortable or able to talk about gain, and the positive aspects that follow such gain (“I don’t see that I have ‘lost’ anything. I have definitely been challenged on the way I think about and see things, but I see that as a massive positive”). These data also emphasise how loss is experienced differently for people – one person “gained the confidence to speak my thoughts” whereas another person “lost a confidence in my grasp on leadership and how I am a leader in my workplace”.

Natasha alerts us to the more debilitating aspects of loss and letting go. She describes how “I had lost everything I had known before”, leaving her with no “recognisable points of reference”. This is a “dangerous” and “frightening” place for her, as she did not have the “support” or “scaffold” around her to help her work through this experience. She believes that this was a place the programme “wanted me to go to”, and it made her feel like she was being “rewired”. Natasha appears to accept some responsibility for this experience, yet she also expected the facilitators to support her more strongly, which leaves her “resent[ing]” the programme for not providing adequate support.

Extended interaction: Dropping identities

I have chosen one extended interaction from the fourth residential. At this residential, the facilitators introduced the idea of “dropping one’s tools”, which I have included in this broader discourse of “letting go”. The facilitators used Karl Weick’s (2006) analogy of the Mann Gulch fire and the fire-fighters who did not drop their tools – but needed to. In particular, the facilitators seemed to encourage participants to drop identities of expertise, as these may not be the curious and experimental identities that leadership apparently requires. The table below includes some of the description of this concept from a facilitator, and excerpts from the accompanying PowerPoint slides.

The facilitator Rachael is describing the “drop your tools” concept to the large group. She says, “tools represent ways of knowing, expertise. Without them, they’re not fire-fighters. Instead of dropping all your tools, you are going to retain some. [...] The things that give you your sense of self are the things you need to set aside to survive. [...] In leadership, you need to consider dropping your ways of knowing to create spaces to see alternatives.”

Her accompanying slides suggest participants need to:

- “Drop your tools or you will die” (Weick, 2009, p. 247)
- Drop crystal
- Drop frames
- Drop assumptions
- Drop ways of knowing
- Drop (be agile with) identities. “Without my tools who am I? A coward? A fool?” (Weick, 2009, p. 253)

I have chosen to recite these quotes from the slides, as one of these is particularly pertinent to the interaction I will analyse below. At this residential, the participants were asked to share a story about their leadership challenges that ties in with their larger stories about “passion, aspiration, vitality, purpose, love” (taken from PowerPoint slide). These stories were recorded and transcribed. Several of the participants talked about letting go/dropping identities, which signals that the participants adopted the facilitators’ discourse. I have selected one of these participants, Robyn, as she seems to speak to Weick’s question, without my tools who am I?

The following is an excerpt from the transcription of Robyn's story. She shares it with a group of participants, who were asked to "sketch/ draw out the point where you see/ hear/ feel the vitality/ aspiration/ purpose/ connection/ passion of who is speaking most" and reflect this back to Robyn.

Robyn: I've got to let go of that engineer identity to be able to kind of work with teams a little bit. Like kind of step out of, because I'm going kind of into a sort of more, my role is changing in the fact that I've got more of a team underneath me and I'm working in a project that's more complex and it's more at the start of the project, it's not in the building phase. So I've really got to stop that doing a little bit and I've got to help the guys under me do and grow. Because [...] I tend to see the gaps in things and tend to grab hold of them rather than actually sharing them with the group and that's why the group works. I don't know. In my thing upstairs they sort of had that I need to stop doing and to start being a leader. This leadership stuff's scary. I mean I've done this kind of engineering stuff and I've been successful and that's fine, but I don't know how to be and who I am in leadership and who I am without that kind of, being that technical person. So it's all about letting that go I think and also I've got to listen to my own voice a bit more. Because I think I've kind of been... and be honest... I don't know. I think it's about seeing how I can influence the situation rather than taking control of it. That's where I've got to anyway.

[...]

Participant A: So what identity do you take in? You have to give up that engineer identity because you're actually being something else. You're not being an engineer, they're being engineers.

Robyn: Yeah, and it's giving them the space to be those engineers.

Participant A: But I think what's holding you back from giving them that space is –

Robyn: Is I hold that identity, yeah, yeah.

Participant A: You know, you're like I'm the engineer –

Robyn: Yeah, I know, yeah, you're right.

Participant A: But you kind of need to chuck that and leave it. If you're going now, well no, I'm not the engineer, you guys are and you almost need to play ignorance and kind of go, well you're the engineers, you tell me.

Robyn: Yeah, yeah, no, you're right.

The "tool" which Robyn describes she needs to let go of is her engineer identity as she associates it with being individualistic, a technical expert, "grab[bing] hold" of gaps and not "sharing them", and being successful. Her rationale for needing to let go of this identity is that it inhibits her ability to "grow" the "guys under me". In letting go of this engineer identity, Robyn hopes to become a "leader" who can influence the situation "rather than taking control of it".

Robyn seems reticent, tentative, and uncertain about this letting go, as reflected in phrases such as “kind of”, “sort of”, “a little bit”, and “I don’t know”, which permeate her speech. She may be scared about dropping her engineer identity and becoming a leader as “I don’t know how to be and who I am in leadership and who I am without that kind of, being that technical person [...] I don’t know who I’m going to be”. This is the crux of Robyn’s story. It illuminates the fear, uncertainty, and discomfort involved in letting go an identity, as Robyn assumes that letting an identity go means she needs to become someone else. She seems to have linked her engineer identity with inhibiting, negative ways of being, which reflects her interpretation of the facilitators’ discouragement of expert identities. But does she really have to let it go entirely? Is it even possible to? Or is it just some aspects of that identity? According to the participant who responds to her story, she does need to let it go entirely (“you need to be something else”) and this something else is an identity of ignorance: acting as if she does not know about engineering and asking her team to “tell me”. The assumption here is that if Robyn is being the engineer it is “holding you back” and not “giving them the space to be those engineers”.

The impetus for this letting go seems to be her changing role and the nature of the project (initial stages and more complex), and perhaps more significantly, there seems to be pressures from other people telling her to “let go” of this engineer identity – indeed the facilitators encourage participants to “drop their tools” (“The things that give you your sense of self are the things you need to set aside to survive”.) This is reflected in her interaction with the other participant who is telling her “you need to be something else”, “you ... need to chuck that”, “you have to give up”. To which Robyn affirms their statements, “you’re right”, “yeah, yeah”. However, she seems uncomfortable with this as she says in her story “I’ve got to listen to my own voice a bit more”; however when she tries to elaborate upon this idea she seems to pull back (“I don’t know”).

Finally, there does not seem to be much discussion of how Robyn is going to let go of such a central, safe, and successful identity. Letting go somehow involves a process of stopping behaviour, in order to start being something else (“stop doing and start being”). The other participant almost seems careless about the process (“chuck that”, “leave it”). Given the anxiety that some participants feel about letting go, perhaps those in development need to further explore the experience and implications of this process.

Key questions and summary

This discourse of “letting go” refers to a movement in identity work in which individuals are encouraged to (and some attempt to) let go of aspects of their identity. This particular leadership development programme encouraged participants to think of dropping “tools”, such as their ways of knowing and being; therefore, this is one example of participants taking up a discourse promoted by the facilitators. Participants in turn started to tell themselves and others to do this. Some seem to relish this opportunity to let go of old habits, preconceptions, limiting self-beliefs, and inhibiting identities. Underlying this sentiment is an assumption shared by some that what is let go is “lost for good” and it will “make space for better things”. Others who experiment with letting go feel anxious and nervous, as they wonder who they will be without this identity.

This discourse incites a number of questions. First of all, whilst some participants place great hope in who they will become once they can let go, it is not clear how they will actually let go of aspects of who they are. Therefore, what is the process of letting go? Secondly, it appears that participants are reluctant or not invited to talk about what they will hold constant. So amidst all this letting go, what will participants maintain or hold? Perhaps this “letting go” needs to be balanced with discussions about what will not be let go. Thirdly, whilst some participants talk about the loss experienced with letting go, others talk of what

they gain through it; therefore, is letting go all that distinct from construction and acquisition forms of identity work? Lastly, is there more challenging needed of this discourse considering that participants are encouraging each other to let go of discouraged “expert” identities and instead adopt more ignorant behaviours? In the attempt to let go of aspects of one’s identity, participants may struggle with slipping back (or the fear of slipping back) into these “old” identities. The final analysis section deals with this notion of slipping back.

Undoing Discourse 7: Slipping Back into Old Identities

Slipping back refers to the concerns or fears that participants can harbour about slipping back into old identities which they hope to have moved on from. While this can be a generative feeling or process, it can result in self-destructive talk for those who feel disappointed in themselves when they do slip back. The data suggest that developers need to assist participants in building the ability to “catch themselves” and others before – or when – they slip. The data table below covers a series of talk about slipping back in order to unpack the various meanings of this movement.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• falling back into the tried and trusted ways• slip back into the old identity• slip back into being [that] Jared• the space that I fall into | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• falling back into how I normally do things• reverting to your expert engineer self• hard to sustain an identity• catching myself |
|---|---|

It seems that the identities which participants slip back into are ones which offer some certainty, expertise, routine, and familiarity (“tried and tested”, “normally”, “expert”). This alludes to the difficulty of sustaining a different identity when the pulls to habitual and successful identities exist. The use of slipping back here is similar to its dictionary definition, as there are hints of reversion and deterioration to a lesser state. Such a process may raise questions about how an individual can “catch oneself” before they have fallen back entirely.

The next section of data goes into more detail about these assumptions.

A selection of data: Online talk and shorter interaction

The table below contains various slices of writing from participants’ assignments.

Where have I got to development wise so far in the programme? I consistently find myself falling back into the tried and trusted ways that have served me so well in my job. I am more aware of where I need to focus my attention but at times find it a massive struggle to try and use the learnings of the programme in my workplace. I have to consistently monitor my own work to ensure that I am not programmed to manage. (Russell, development snapshot 1)
--

I too struggle to bring a different identity into different spaces and can all too often find myself switching off because I've already made up my mind before I've even heard what they have to say. It's a tough thing to do changing your identity, and it would be easy to tick a box and just look like you're waiting to hear someone out, but to just listen and then act/speak after actually understanding their point of view is really tough. Don't know how you guys felt, but it was so easy to slip back into the old identity after our exercise in [residential workshop 3]. (Paul, online post)

I don't want to slip back into being the Jared that would sit in the corner and watch and listen, before being sure that what I did next was the right thing to do. I want to take my team and get out there! Coming up with some great ideas that haven't been tried before, and allowing them to take these risks too. (Jared, development snapshot 1)

A barrier for me is my comfort zone - the space that I fall into where I go with the flow, I comfort and I just let things go one day at a time - I enjoy not being challenged because things are easy - this for me is my biggest enemy - I MUST stay away from this mindset in order to excel as a leader. Moving overseas will be great in a way to get out of the known environment that I am currently in - I have been in the same school since I started teaching so most staff still see me as a newbie [...] I am much more confident not only speaking to others but leading my colleagues and my teaching practice has improved as well - I feel this comes down to me stepping out of my comfort zone and taking risks. I have learnt my comfort zone is getting wider than it originally was and I have learnt that I can disagree with people - I don't always have to agree and be Mr Nice and happy. People will still respect me as a leader and a person if I disagree from time to time or push hard to get my point across. I also realise that it will be easy to slip back into being a comforter again and while this is not always a bad thing I know that if I am always comforting I will never progress or make a difference in a way that is productive for everyone. (Derek, development snapshot 1)

I'm struggling a little bit to be honest as I always seem to be falling back into how I normally do things. That way I know it gets done and gets done properly. I am finding it hard to sustain an identity because I get frustrated at the lack of response and action from others. Maintenance is my next goal... and exploring why some people just don't want to do stuff (Kate, online post)

One of the first questions the data raises is what is the state or place that participants fear slipping back into? It is described as stagnant and static ("sit in the corner") where no risks are taken; a state of not actively listening and understanding others; a "comfort zone" where they are not challenged and "go with the flow"; the "tried and tested" which produces easy results; the zone of management not leadership; and places outside of the programme (i.e. workplace). For one participant, these old identities are his "enemy" which he "MUST stay away from" to the point where he suggests literally moving overseas to avoid them.

The participants do not want to slip back from "new" identities which allow them to be someone who "push[es] hard", where they are "actually understanding their point of view",

able to disagree with others and not be “Mr Nice and happy” all the time, where they “take risks”, and “take my team and get out there” with “great ideas”. It is an identity of progression and action, where they “make a difference in a way that is productive for everyone”.

There seems to be a range of triggers for slipping back into old identities, such as: wanting to achieve results (“it gets done and gets done properly”); an inability to transfer learnings of the programme to the workplace; and the feeling that changing one’s identity is “really tough” and “hard to sustain”. One participant is “struggling” with sustaining a different identity because “I get frustrated at the lack of response and action from others”. This seems to be a critique of one of the assumptions in the programme that altering one’s identity enables others to change theirs.

“Catching myself” interaction

Despite the aversion to slipping back into old identities, participants rarely talk about how they will avoid or deal with this slipping back. This may signal a resignation to the involuntary and uncontrollable nature of slipping back. The interaction below between a facilitator, Rachael, and participant, Robyn, foregrounds this movement of “catching yourself” before/whilst slipping back. Robyn appeared in the “letting go” discourse, as she is trying to let go of her expert engineer identity; however, the data chronicles her plight with this task. The table begins with an excerpt from Robyn’s “travel plan”, and is followed by Rachael’s written response/commentary to this plan. The third excerpt of data is taken from Robyn’s “travel log” which she wrote two months after the travel plan.

<p>Robyn: I want to explore who I am when I am not the engineer in the room at work. This is about being able to drop my tools. I think this will help me provide space for others within my team to take this role and help with delegation. I am going to try thinking of myself as “the teacher” or similar to start with. This is so I view the situation differently, and therefore I can be different. I am also going to try this when I am working with other discipline leads. If I am “the teacher”, I am going to help them see why I am where I am rather than defending</p>

my position. I am going to play around with this. (Robyn, travel plan)

Rachael: I would like to see you develop practices and relationships which help you “catch” when you are reverting to your expert engineer self and drag you back out of there! What do you think those might need to be for you? (Rachel to Robyn, travel plan)

Robyn: I am more aware of who I am being in different situations [...] I have been catching myself when I go to give her task oriented work. [...] In other meetings, I feel I have been able to challenge areas with cutting the conversation flow or instantly offering solutions myself. However, when I really care about an issue and think I know the answer, I find myself not listening. I have been catching myself doing this and then I sit back for a few minutes and actively listen. [...] I have been asking myself before I pick up the phone or “cc” [email] my technical directors, what am I looking for? (Robyn, travel log 1)

Robyn describes how she wants to stop being the “the engineer in the room at work” and instead be more of a “teacher”. She presumes that this will “help me provide space for others” to take up the role of an engineer. Through adopting a “teacher” identity, Robyn hopes she will change both her mindset (“view the situation differently”) and identity (“be different”). However, it is not quite clear how a “teacher” is different from an “engineer”.

The facilitator Rachael asks Robyn to “develop practices and relationships which help you ‘catch’ when you are reverting” to her old self and that will “drag you back out of there”. Whilst Robyn does not directly respond to Rachael’s question, she later describes how she is “catching myself” by being “more aware” of who she is in the moment, and asking herself questions before acting. Her techniques therefore seem to be internal conversations with herself, rather than creating relationships with others who do some of this “catching”.

Extended interaction: Kate

The following material from a participant, Kate, and facilitator, Cassandra, provides more longitudinal detail about slipping back and catching one’s self. The truncated interaction starts with Kate’s travel plan and Cassandra’s response to it, then moves on to a passage two months later from her first travel log, and finishes with an excerpt from her second travel log which she wrote three months after the initial plan.

Kate's "travel plan"

On undertaking this journey, I need to find my authentic voice to make it happen. I need to stop hiding in the shadows and take responsibility for making myself heard. I need to stop the self-doubt and drop the self-destructive tools that I have collected along the way, or change those tools into something positive that I can work with. [...] **My travel plans are...** Sort out who I am and what I want. I think by doing this, it will open up a lot of doors and possibilities that I can't currently see or ignore. I plan to find my authentic voice, to be heard and to be recognised. [...] **Who I intend to be in my travels is...** Someone that is honest with myself and with others. I want to be someone that doesn't constantly worry about people judging them and this affecting the person that I am. I want to be someone that is true to myself and my values.

Facilitator's response to Kate

[...] What I would like to get you to consider is setting up a peer reflection practice with someone from FL on a regular basis so that you can focus on how you are framing situations, yourself, or anything that matters and have them reflect that back to you. This could help you to refine your framing practice and for you to see the things you cannot see so easily in the way you are seeing yourself or your environment. This is also a great way to catch yourself talk (by having to say things out loud) and to actively reframe what is going on so you can tell another story of it and then see how you can be different in that story.

Kate's travel log 1 (two months after 'plan')

Since starting my new role, I have started to use my authentic voice and I feel that this has had some very powerful outcomes. Firstly, rather than keeping my thoughts to myself, and secretly hoping that opportunities may eventuate, I have summoned up the confidence and approached key stakeholders to discuss this with them. Their reactions were at first, somewhat taken aback, purely because they had no idea that these ideas were what I was thinking, and secondly we were able to discuss these honestly and openly as they knew exactly where I stood on the matter. This was really groundbreaking for me, because I was able to know exactly what the process was, even though the outcome was not what I had initially hoped for, I now knew exactly what the answer was and I no longer had to keep fighting for something that wasn't going to happen. What it did do, was open up a new dimension to what this certain person thought about me and I was honestly surprised.

Kate's travel log 2 (three months after 'plan')

I think I am feeling frustrated because I keep going to use some of the tools I have gathered along the way, knowing it will do the job, yet it won't have a nice polished finish to it. I can take that step back, I can see that I need to use the tool in a different way, yet I get so focused on getting it done, it turns out slightly messy. And I don't know why I keep doing it! Sometimes I think I am making some great progress, yet at the same time, I feel like I keep falling back into the tried and true way that I know isn't effective yet I feel that I don't have the time or energy to put into something that will take longer. This really irritates me when I see myself doing it. I feel like I am letting myself down and not actively letting go so that I can better myself. [...] Sometimes I feel like my head is about to explode with all of the things going on inside it that I don't allow myself to slow down, take some time out to process it, and talk it over with someone else. I feel that I need to keep holding onto it tightly, at least until I have figured it out for myself. [...]

I find I am still living a lot within my own head, forming opinions, trying to figure out what is happening that sometimes I think I must appear stupid and not comprehending what is going on. I need to be more upfront that I am processing all this information and playing out different situations in my own head before saying anything out loud. I have just realised that this must consume so much of my energy that no wonder I am so exhausted by the end of the day. Because I don't sense make with anyone else at work, I am trying to figure it all out myself, and this isn't actually that beneficial. But how do I find someone that I can trust to do this with? I am letting myself down by doing this, and I need to let go to be able to move forward and have the headspace and energy to listen to the real story.

These data signal Kate's intentions to change who she is being in her leadership, and whilst she seems to be achieving this at one point, she seems to slip back into her negative self-talk, and becomes disappointed with herself for doing so. Kate's initial travel plan contains repeated self-disciplining statements, "I need to stop", "I need to find", which seems to signal that she has become someone she does not want to be, and that she needs to construct a more desired identity. She wants to move away from a person who has "self-doubt", and "self-destructive tools", who "hides in the shadows" and is not "heard" because she has not found her "authentic voice", and who "constantly" worries about people "judging" her. Cassandra suggests the practice of "catching" herself as a central part of her identity work. In particular, she suggests Kate works on "catch[ing] your frame" and "self talk" and "reframing" or telling "another story" so that "you can be different", rather than "telling yourself how 'not to be'". What seems important here is that Cassandra asks Kate to do this "catching" in conversation with another person through "peer reflection".

In her first travel log, Kate seems more excited, courageous, and active. She appears to be experimenting with voicing her opinion, which has led her down "groundbreaking" and "surprising" paths. However, a couple of months later, Kate seems to have slipped back into her "self-doubt" and "self-destructive" identity. She appears frustrated and disappointed with herself that she keeps "falling back into the tried and tested way" even when she knows she should not be doing this, yet "I don't know why I keep doing it!" She explains how she does

not “have the time and energy” to take the “longer” route of doing something different. She feels “irritated” that she is “letting myself down”. Again we see the reappearance of disciplining language (“I need to be”, “I must appear stupid”).

Importantly, Kate seems to have withdrawn into herself. She seems weary of sharing her struggle with someone else (“how do I find someone I can trust”), which leaves her “trying to figure it all out myself” to the point where she feels like “my head is about to explode with all the things going on inside it”. It appears that there is a link between slipping back and letting go, as Kate seems to keep “slipping back” into old identities because she is not letting go (“I need to let go to be able to move forward”, “holding on to it tightly”, “not actively letting go so I can better myself”).

Key questions and summary

This discourse of “slipping” or “falling back” into “old” ways of being suggests an alternative movement to the common conceptualisation of identity work as forward progression. The data suggest that some participants fear slipping back into old identities as it is seen as a regression to a lesser state (where for example, they are stagnant, doing management, and are not challenged). Another participant seems harshly disappointed with herself that she keeps slipping back. It is possible that slipping back can be imperceptible, which is perhaps why two of the facilitators encourage participants to develop “practices and relationships” which will enable them to “catch yourself”.

This discourse raises a number of questions. Firstly, is fear or anxiety about slipping back a productive emotion to have about this process? In the example of Kate, it seems that such an emotion leads her to be quite hard on herself. Rather than being a generative emotion, it appears that for some participants this causes them to speak quite negatively towards

themselves. Would it be more helpful if slipping back is reframed from a regression to a lesser state, to a meaning that recognises it as a part of the fluidity of identity work?

Finally, if slipping back is an anticipated movement in identity work, perhaps leadership development should focus not on how to avoid slipping back but instead on developing the “practices and relationships” to “catch” oneself. The data suggest it is vital to establish these techniques in relation to and connection with other people – not doing so seems to place an extraordinary burden on the individual. This idea of “catching” yourself was introduced by the facilitators, yet participants struggled to engage with it. Having covered all seven discourses, I will now summarise these as well as suggest how they intersect and mix together.

Summary of Findings

The preceding chapters indicate that in the pursuit of developing one's leadership identity, participants may experience moments of being undone. In addition, the facilitators, those often tasked with the responsibility of initiating and negotiating this undoing, can also be undone. The data suggest seven different motions of undoing that can be experienced, which range from the more energising and invigorating to the more debilitating and destructive.

The first of these energising discourses, "open/loosen up", captures the moments in development where participants feel that their mindset and identity have been limbered up from a stuck, fixed, or closed position, and in doing so they notice a proliferation of more choices, pathways, and ways to move. Being opened up appears to be a positive and delightful experience which may reconnect participants with their emotions (such as love, truth, honesty) as well as with other people. Participants seem to both open up themselves and hope that others will do it to them as well. This form of undoing is perhaps necessary for a learning or development journey. I find it intriguing that participants appear silent about what will remain fixed, closed off, or hidden. This discourse raises the question should leadership development contain discussions about what aspects of identity an individual would like to protect – without losing the excitement and joy the discourse incites? A more critical reading might perceive opening up as a vital stage in rendering participants vulnerable to taking on the discourses of the programme. While being opened up refers to the potential to be emancipated from fixed and limited identities, it could also raise concerns about what participants are being exposed to? Lastly, the material raises the question, is being stuck or fixed a state to be feared and escaped from or does it provide a necessary holding zone for development?

The discourse of “floundering” speaks to participants who become helplessly lost and stuck in their undoing. Such participants seem to be struggling with generating movement to break their spiralling and thrashing about. It could be that floundering is an ultimate identity and leadership challenge. That is, if we accept that floundering is created in certain relational dynamics, the way we break free from it is by acting differently in those interactions. The experimental identity work needed here must be acted (not talked about) with others – and will require others to alter how they are acting as well. This floundering experience may well be a vital moment in leadership and its development, and therefore how can it be experienced without resulting in withdrawal? Why are participants unable to escape floundering even when they have been helped? Faced with these calls for help, what identities (other than “superman”) could facilitators adopt in this situation? Furthermore, if inaction is a contributing factor to being trapped in a floundering state, how can participants move from *talking about doing* to *actually doing* in a programme which is structured around online dialogue? If one of the reasons that floundering is collectively created is due to individuals not feeling challenged or shaken up enough, how can this agitation be fostered in way that inspires movement? The participants call upon the facilitators to save them; however, even with such interventions they still seem to struggle with leading themselves out of this state. This can leave participants feeling stressed and utterly exhausted, contemplating whether they should withdraw from the programme.

The discourse of “being playful” and moving between different identities appears to be the facilitators’ preferred form of undoing behaviour. They seem to promote this discourse as a way of undoing participants from being stuck or fixed in one way of being. The participants respond differently to the facilitators’ invitations to play with their identity: some seem hesitant and reluctant to engage in it; and others adopt the discourse but do not seem to enact it. This finding suggests that there is much critical inquiry needed into this discourse. Do

constructionist forms of leadership development have a responsibility to question their encouragement of bringing non-work selves into their workplace – and the overly agentic view of identity work? Do the facilitators enact this playful identity work discourse they promote to the participants? Why do many of the participants seem silent when facilitators implicate who the “others need to be” in another individual’s identity work? Why do some participants struggle to enact their “multiple” identity work which they appear to talk so eloquently about? What are the ethics of participants using this discourse to develop a kind of leadership identity work which seeks to gain control, power, and authority over others?

The fourth discourse, “shaken up”, also provides an energy and enthusiasm for participants. It refers to the experience of having one’s mindset and identity gently agitated, disrupted, and unsettled. Triggers for this process seem to be the arrival of new and contradictory knowledge about leadership, as well as questions targeting the identity of a person. This discourse can be bewildering and disorientating, yet participants seem to find these emotions enlightening and generative. Some participants can feel that their sense of “wholeness” is fragmented after being shaken up, leaving them uncertain as to how they will put themselves back together – yet trusting that this will happen. Therefore, how might development negotiate the struggle some participants experience with becoming fragmented rather than an intact whole? Furthermore, it appears that some participants attempt to shake up themselves; however, it seems more common that participants call upon others to do this to them. Therefore, how might leadership development build the capacity in participants to take responsibility for their own undoing rather than mainly calling upon others to do this? If shaking up is a vital part of leadership development, how can participants and facilitators deal with those who deflect or ignore it? Lastly, how can leadership development programmes create a form of shaking up that is sensitive to fragilities and does not become cutting apart – yet does not dilute the necessary agitation? How can it be “beautiful” and not “destructive?”

How can programmes be designed to move participants between the shaking and its accompanying settling?

The discourse “cut apart” speaks to the moments of disintegration and combustion which some participants may experience. It leaves some participants feeling “shattered” and questioning their identity in quite critical ways. However, there does seem to be a flicker of hope amongst some participants that this experience can offer them “growth”. The participants appear to invite and desire this form of undoing, which at times means that the facilitators are positioned as “holding the knife” – a source of discomfort for some facilitators. Why do some of the facilitators deny their role in this discourse whilst others seem to be saddled with the responsibility of doing it? Why do participants position themselves as the receiver of other people’s cutting apart attempts, rather than taking a more active role? If participants say that they do not want development to be “confrontational” and “negative”, and at the same time they discourage being “nice and polite”, what exactly is it they are asking for? And why do they seem “disgusted” when they witness it? Is there an ethics of care (Gabriel, 2009) which should accompany this form of undoing – both for those receiving it and those enacting it? Finally, how do those involved in development navigate the tension between participants asking to be “helped back on track” and others accusing them of “re-forming them to your own liking”?

Some participants also seem willing to let go aspects of their identities. This “letting go” discourse appears to have originated from the facilitators, and some participants seem to relish in the opportunity to explore it. Some participants intentionally consider what parts of themselves they would benefit from dropping, and seem elated and hopeful about the person who they can become in doing so. Others appear more anxious and uncertain about who they will become without these tried and tested identities. Similar to the “open up” discourse, there does not seem to be much conversation about what aspects of their identity the individual will

hold constant, what they will not let go of. Should leadership development programmes therefore engage in conversations that explore what an individual would like to maintain? Should there be more challenging of this “letting go” discourse, especially if it seems participants encourage each other to let go of “expert” identities and become “ignorant”? While some participants talk about the loss experienced with letting go, others talk of what they gain through it, therefore is letting go all that distinct from construction and acquisition forms of identity work?

In trying to change their identity, some participants express their fear of slipping back into old identities and ways of being. This discourse of undoing therefore refers to the regression, relapse, and reversal that some can experience in their attempt to alter their identity. Some frame it as an undesirable “enemy”, and the participants who do appear to slip back seem to castigate and discipline themselves in quite destructive terms. They appear to slip back into more of an isolated identity in which they seem silenced and withdrawn, unable to communicate their experience with others. The facilitators introduce the idea of catching oneself to avoid this total reversion; however, the “practices and relationships” of this process do not appear to be strongly developed. Therefore, what is involved in catching oneself? Does it offer a means of reducing the fear of slipping back and its seeming imperceptibility? Would it be more helpful to reframe slipping back from an enemy one should fear, to rather an acknowledgement that it is part of the fluidity of identity work? In doing so, might this avoid the destructive self-disciplining which some participants engage in?

I would like to finish this summary by drawing together the connections across the various discourses. The process of being opened up seems to involve the letting go of fixed, closed, and stuck beliefs and positions. In addition, movements of shaking up or cutting apart could trigger the opening up of one’s identity. However, shaking up is distinguishable from cutting apart as it is a gentler and more benign process than the painful and forceful experience of

cutting apart. Shaking up also seems to involve more self-undoing than cutting apart in which people are “done to” rather than doing. Letting go is connected to opening up, as participants seem to hope that in letting go static, out-dated, or locked identities one will become more limber and unfastened. However, the failure to truly let go of old ways of being seems to result in a person slipping back into them. Being trapped in a floundering state has connections to several discourses. It seems that floundering can occur when an individual has been shaken up and they are unsure what to do with the fragmented “pieces”. This fragmented state may signal that participants will need to engage in acts of identity rebuilding and reconstructing in order to get out of floundering. On the other hand, perhaps shaking up is one way to get out of floundering. The data suggest that floundering may occur when an individual continually asks to be shaken up but does not receive it. It seems that these discourses do not connect in a linear fashion; rather, they brush up together in a mess of various combinations. The next chapter steps back from the mire of data, and reconnects with theoretical discussions in order to understand the meaning and impact of undoing in its various forms.

CHAPTER 9

Theorising Undoing Through Unravelling Binary Oppositions

In my previous three chapters, I proposed seven discourses of undoing that constitute the reality of doing identity work in a leadership development programme. There are several pathways this discussion chapter could take to make sense of the findings raised in the empirical chapters. What caught my attention as I re-read the key questions posed in each section are the tensions or binaries that seem to permeate the discourses. In this chapter, I focus on three of these binary oppositions: construction/undoing; facilitator/participant; and care/criticality. Using deconstructive movements, I explore how both opposing terms haunt each other in order to articulate the intricacy of undoing processes. However, the first task is to return to the undoing literature covered in chapter 3 in an effort to extend how undoing is theorised.

Extending the Undoing Literature

Using literature from fields beyond organisation studies, I previously suggested that there are seven ways in which undoing is currently understood: as unsettling, “negative magic”, opening up, shedding, loss, stripping back, and destroying. These interpretations are generally confirmed by my research; therefore, I will focus on offering three more discourses not strongly present in the literature: undoing as slipping back, floundering, and playful experimentation. The first of these, slipping back, refers to a type of reversal or regression which is different to the reversal Freud envisioned in “negative magic”. Instead, it refers to lapsing into an old and undesirable identity which the individual hoped to let go of or unfasten themselves from. As this seems to be a feared process, participants who revert to anti-identities can spiral into negative self-disciplining talk, which leaves them feeling disheartened and disappointed with themselves (“I feel like I am letting myself down and not

actively letting go so that I can better myself”, p. 200). Rather than using the anxiety-inducing language of reversion, I suggest that slipping back could be more productively framed as part of the fluidity of identity work. In doing so, it contains similarities with defaulting processes and therefore could be an interesting concept to use for anti-identity research (Carroll & Levy, 2008).

The “floundering” discourse refers to the helpless circling, stumbling, and wallowing the participants seem to experience when trying to make sense of their individual and in particular their collective identities. People feel unable to move in any direction as they do not know how to move, or where to move to, despite receiving suggestions from others. It seems to be a cumbersome and draining experience that can leave people questioning their commitment to the group or other organisational forms. The participants feel they are “losing the plot” (Thomas & Linstead, 2002, p. 71) as they struggle to hold onto a secured, stable sense of identity, leading to a “heightened fragility” (p. 77). One way to break free from floundering is to experiment with acting differently in the collective, particularly in ways that build possible directions for progression and movement. Floundering could be a consequence of being unable to move forward from some undoing efforts (i.e. opening up), or of not being undone when desired (i.e. being shaken up). The ability to move groups from floundering states may also be a vital leadership capacity, just as it may be a state created by the ambiguity and opaqueness of leadership and management (Thomas & Linstead, 2002).

The idea of experimenting or playing with different identities could be seen as another form of undoing, where undoing is understood as being unfastened from stuck or unhelpful identities. The participants were encouraged to see themselves as a “parliament of selves” (Mead, 1934), and to consciously animate and foreground different identities than one would normally exhibit in a certain interaction or situation. A few leadership scholars have recently mentioned this idea of identity play (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Ibarra

and Petriglieri (2010) differ slightly as they focus more on trialling possible future selves; whereas the Catalyst Programme assumes that these selves are already parts of one's repertoire. It is an important discourse to highlight as it could be the preferred form of identity undoing in leadership programmes that use a social constructionist philosophy, as arguably it facilitates the enlarging of identity options for participants (Carroll & Levy, 2010). If this is a preferred form of identity work, yet the participants struggled to enact it in an enduring or meaningful way, this thesis suggests that further investigation is necessary.

These different forms of undoing show how it manifests in various ways, at different times, and for different people. Different forms of undoing bring different types of energy – from energising and delightful, to debilitating and destructive. It is worked with in unpredictable and diverse ways: it can be resisted, deflected, reshaped, invited, embraced, imposed, yearned for, and lamented. It is undeniably a phenomenon which is created and endured in relationships with other people. Undoing is therefore an intricate concept, and the next section draws on binary oppositions in order to explore this intricacy.

Construction and Undoing as “Inhabiting Each Other”

Looking back at the data sections, a range of binary oppositions about identity and undoing seem to permeate the discourses and especially the key questions I raise. Appendix G contains a summary table of each discourse and the key questions. Given that undoing is used to describe deconstructive work (for example, Game's (1991) text *Undoing the Social: Toward a Deconstruction of Sociology*), it seems fitting to expose and unsettle some binary oppositions as a means of further understanding the process of undoing. The box on the following page contains several of these binaries evident in the empirical chapters.

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| • open/close | • agency/structure |
| • care/critical | • help/re-form |
| • talk/action | • shake/settle |
| • invite/repel | • fragment/whole |
| • nice/push | • receive/enact |
| • slip back/catch | • let go/hold on |
| • protect/destroy | • loss/gain |
| • fixed/fluid | |

The presence of binaries in my research is perhaps no surprise given that binaries exist in identity research more generally (for example, agency/structure; subject/object; singular/multiple and so on). Furthermore, the etymological root of develop, developer, is a binary itself as it means to both “undo” and “wrap up”. This thesis also has a binary at its centre: doing/undoing, or more specifically, construction/undoing. Writers following the work of Jacques Derrida (1976) would contend that binaries are inescapable in any text as a word only has meaning by virtue of its difference from other words: what it is not, what it excludes, and what other words infuse it. Therefore, the focus is not about ascertaining whether binaries exist in this text; rather, the question becomes, how do binaries help us further understand undoing and identity?

Derrida (1976) argues that a binary opposition usually marginalises or suppresses one of the terms in favour of heightening and privileging the other (i.e. writing/speech, absence/presence, male/female, reason/emotion, normal/abnormal, white/black, and so on). The heightening of one term (i.e. masculine) is possible precisely because of the “othering” of its opposing word (i.e. feminine) (Knights, 1997). Whilst Derrida’s work is intentionally opaque and convoluted, some scholars have determined that he usually focuses on the suppressed term, and shows how it haunts the other term (Kilduff, 1993). Dualisms can be responded to in a number of ways: they can be ignored, or articulated but maintained, or reconciled/overturned, or deconstructed (Knights, 1997). By deconstructing binaries, an

attempt is made to collapse the extreme positioning of the two alternatives, to show how the two are inescapably infused with each other.

In the case of construction/undoing, I earlier proposed that scholarly attention has privileged construction forms of identity work, whilst less attention has been paid to its “other” undoing. Whilst the temptation could be to overturn this “higher” construction focus and replace it with the “lower” undoing term (Cooper, 1989), such a manoeuvre continues to maintain a problematic positioning of undoing and construction as separate and distinct from each other. Rather, Cooper (1989, p. 483) prefers a second movement of deconstruction, “metaphorization”, which acknowledges how “the individual terms actually inhabit each other”. Therefore, whilst my thesis focuses on the lesser-known “undoing” term, and excludes “construction”, this section proposes that it is impossible to talk or enact construction forms of identity work without invoking undoing, and vice versa.

Whilst a deconstructive intent could advocate for the complete eradication of binaries, Collinson (2005) suggests that the existence of dialectics can provide a useful analytical tool, especially for leadership studies. That is, if we interpret binary oppositions as containing elements of each other, rather than as distinct entities, we can begin to see how they may be mutually reinforcing, interdependent, contradictory, and ambiguous (Collinson, 2005). In doing so, we begin to see how the two words exist in “dynamic tension” and “interplay” – they are a “both-and” scenario, rather than “either-or” (Fairhurst, 2001, as cited in Collinson, 2005, p. 1420). Following this, we would see slipping back not as an enemy to be feared, but a way to connect with others through “catching” each other; letting go becomes a process that can be felt as both loss and gain; and pain can be felt from both growth and destruction of one’s identity.

I suggest three main consequences for holding construction and undoing as fused together in dynamic tension. First of all, it invites facilitators (and participants) to consider absent and marginalised concepts in order to balance discussions. For example, if programmes are focused on identity construction, acquisition, and/or maintenance, it is necessary to explore how undoing is present, or why it is discouraged and absent. If the discourse of letting go aspects of one's identities is promoted, the silenced absence here centres on what is held on to, and could be integrated into a discussion about this discourse. The same could be said about the "opening up" discourse (what is kept closed off?) and discussions that assume an unbridled agency in individuals' identity work (what discursive, material, and social constraints need to be contended with?). It invites people involved in development to search for and address contradictions and dualisms that invariably arise in development. This requires a commitment to seeing leadership development not as a "wrapped up" state that is secure, stable, and coherent; rather, they submit it to deconstructionist inquiry. This would involve, for example, interrogating the breakdown between talk and action amongst participants (and possibly themselves) in their playful, multiple identities work, and questioning the desire amongst participants to receive undoing attempts rather than enact them.

Secondly, living with the tension of construction and undoing means that people need the capacity to cope with the tussles and strains of being pushed and pulled between shaking and settling, protection and destruction. This may involve recognising that the fluctuation in participants' energy, motivation, and commitment to the programme (Nicholson & Carroll, 2009) is related to moving between settling and shaking, where perhaps the moments of settling and consolidation feel like a trough rather than a peak. Rather than seeing these troughs as a lack of development, they could be understood as fuelling the peaks of shaking and undoing.

Thirdly, seeing identity construction and undoing as inhabiting each other is one way to explore Carroll and Levy's (2010) description of the leadership development settings as a "multiple discursive field where identities inevitably compete, struggle, contradict, lure, seduce, repel, dominate, and surprise" (p. 225), as construction and undoing can conflict and contradict each other and enable individuals to do identity work in a multitude of ways. In addition, such an approach would advocate deconstructing the artificial divisions cleaved between construction and regulation, which seem to dissect some leadership development research, and instead develop frames and methods for exploring how these various types of identity work can be experienced within the same programme, collective, and individual. In doing so, both "nuanced and creative" and more painful and destructive forms of identity work can be captured (Carroll & Levy, 2010, p. 227).

I realise that my thesis, like other texts that attempt to deconstruct binaries, is an "ambiguous document that both celebrates and condemns its own text even as it points to other texts" (Kilduff, 1993, p. 29). As language, meaning, and writing are always unstable and contested (Derrida, 1976), this thesis could be submitted to deconstruction techniques that would reveal my own limitations and self-contradictions; there may well be other dualisms and present absences which I have failed to explicate. Indeed, in attempting to gain some stability of meaning in this thesis I have relied upon heightening this concept of undoing over construction or other forms of identity work (Mumby & Stohl, 1991). Therefore, at face value, the seven discourses of undoing structure meaning by primarily including phenomena related to undoing, whilst excluding those that relate to construction, acquisition, preservation, and so on. Yet, my questions have attempted to make visible the silences in the data, which often relate to other forms of identity work (i.e. consolidation and regulation). However, by exposing and addressing this construction/undoing binary, these signified

absences are exposed, revealing how any attempt to understand or experience undoing is haunted by notions of construction as well.

I now turn to one of the more apparent binaries in leadership development, facilitator/participant. My next section focuses on this dualism by exploring the variations in acquisition and enactment of the undoing discourses.

Exploring the Facilitator/Participant Binary: Patterns of Enactment and Passivity

One of the more obvious binaries in leadership development is the facilitator/participant relationship. Numerous tensions exist between facilitators and participants and some of these can manifest in processes of identity work – and especially in undoing efforts. The facilitator/participant relationship has similarities with other binaries such as academic/practitioner, leader/follower, therapist/patient, parent/child, teacher/student, expert/novice, and undoer/undone. However, neither participants nor facilitators are stuck in fixed positions of unquestionable power and influence; rather, both groups vie for moments of feeling accepted, respected, admired, valued, knowledgeable, unique, and legitimate. The facilitators are perhaps more able to conceal their own processes of identity work as they are not compelled to confess and disclose as the participants are. They do, however, have a role in establishing some discourses, and the participants call upon the facilitators to intervene, enact, and model certain discourses as well. Figure 3 below places the undoing discourses on a continuum, ranging from those discourses that the participants adopt and actively enact themselves, to those which the participants seem unable or unwilling to enact.

is the work of a facilitator. Like the “cut apart” discourse, some participants explain that they cannot and will not engage in this shaking up behaviour in an online setting as they need to do it face to face in order to gauge the person’s response and mitigate the chance of offending the person. The “play” discourse also seems to be one that the facilitators introduce but which the participants struggle to enact, even if they want to. The facilitators create opportunities to invite participants to play with their identities, and in some cases provide examples of who the participants could be. Despite this discursive modelling, the participants seem unable and/or unwilling to enact it to the extent the programme encourages.

The second set of discourses, “open up”, “slip back”, “let go”, and “flounder” refer to those experiences that the participants seem more active in enacting, both in terms of doing them to themselves and to each other. There is less reliance here upon the facilitators to carry out these forms of undoing. It appears that some participants are able to loosen themselves from moments when they feel stuck and restricted, and that others seem to feel comfortable with expanding and challenging their opinions and beliefs. Those participants who notice – or fear the possibility of – slipping back, do not seem to require the facilitators (or other participants) to catch or save them, although this could be problematic as it seems that “catching” needs to be done in relation to others. The “letting go” discourse was introduced by the facilitators, and adopted by some participants who seemed comfortable doing it to themselves and others. Although floundering seems to be created by the collective, the participants need the facilitators to save them from it; however, the facilitators do not seem entirely sure about how to work with it either.

Overall, if the capacity to be playful, provocative, and experimental with one’s identities, and to challenge superficial or taken-for-granted assumptions, is necessary for the type of critically orientated leadership that some programmes are trying to develop, then this thesis suggests that there are some difficulties in doing so. That is, if participants seem to position

themselves – and be positioned by others – as passive receivers of shaking up or pulling apart behaviours, and it is the facilitators who enact this behaviour, then how is this developing one’s responsibility or ability to do this in their leadership outside the programme? If these participants are meant to initiate and sustain such behaviours within their organisations, then do they need to practise this behaviour rather than relying on facilitators to do it? This tension between actor/receiver in undoing speaks to broader assumptions in leadership development in which participants are seen “as a recipient of didactic input and pre-set pedagogy” (Hotho & Dowling, 2010, p. 610), suggesting that greater disruption of the “participant as recipient” positioning is necessary (p. 612). It may also speak to claims that participants often take on a role as follower rather than leader in development programmes (Carroll & Levy, 2008).

Therefore, perhaps it is unhelpful to position people in the facilitator/participant binary, and instead develop ways of moving between both – or perhaps as Knights (1997) would suggest, eradicate the binary altogether. The Catalyst Programme appeared to attempt this transition as they removed the facilitators from the participants’ development journey for the last six months of the programme: the facilitators no longer initiated or contributed to online discussions, nor did they provide individualised feedback on the participants’ assignments. Some participants seemed to struggle with letting the facilitators go. The online forum was noticeably quieter during the last six months, and the interactions became more superficial and fleeting: robust, in-depth conversations were not entered into, despite a few participants initiating and inviting them. This left some participants remarking on their disappointment that they became disconnected from other participants – but their solution to this was to wait in hope that they would all reconnect at the final residential. Some participants described the final six months as the least productive for their development. There was minimal evidence of shaking up, cutting apart, or identity experimentation, which further suggests that these forms of undoing are mainly possible when facilitators are involved. In place of these

discourses, some of the participants seemed to focus on identity consolidation; on settling rather than shaking.

One way of interpreting the variation in enacting the discourses is to look at the binary care/criticism. My next section will explore this tension.

Tempering an Ethic of Criticism with an Ethic of Care

It seems that undoing, as opposed to construction, teeters on a fine line between productive forms of shaking up one's knowledge and identity, and the reality that this may become destructive. A brief analysis of the language I used in my questions suggests a tension between words such as sensitive, protect, care, escape, ethics; and expose, re-forming, fragilities, and destructive. This leads me to a central tension I would like to focus on, what Gabriel (2009, p. 384) calls the "troublesome and difficult balance" of holding an ethic of care with an ethic of criticism.

Gabriel's (2009) six-page article focuses on critical management education in business schools and his concern that criticism can be destructive and harmful; therefore, educators need to temper this with showing care towards their students. I propose that, like education, leadership development sits on this tension between care and criticism, and it particularly becomes visible and precarious when identity work and undoing are involved. That is, if constructionist forms of leadership development focus on undoing identities, an ethics of care is paramount as "the harmful potential of criticism is most evident when what is criticized is dear to us" (Gabriel, 2009, p. 382). Furthermore, if constructionist forms of development aim to build the participants' capacity to be critical, and becoming critical involves moments of undoing, then facilitators need to hold an ethic of care for participants, as without it, it may lead to debilitating rather than helpful forms of identity work. It follows therefore that functionalist and constructivist forms of leadership development may also need to pay

attention to criticality, rather than building primarily on care. It is necessary to explore in more detail what is meant by this term criticality.

As previously described, the Atlas Institute seems to be informed by critical pedagogy, and could be described as CMS “light” (Alvesson, 2008). That is, through the use of listening, questioning, and reframing techniques, the Atlas Institute hopes that participants will interrogate taken-for-granted realities in order to better understand situations and therefore offer different alternatives. Interactions outlined in the “cut apart” and “shake up” discourses exemplify this approach. The “playful” identity discourse, which draws on social constructionism, could be seen as attempting to emancipate participants from fixed identities. This aligns with Ford and Harding’s (2008) interpretation of critical leadership development, as it has a “liberatory potential” to engage participants in “new and different ways of thinking about leadership” (p. 475). This involves challenging the “taken-for-granted, hegemonic concepts of leadership”, and exploring alternative ways of “seeing, interpreting and understanding themselves and their work organizations”, in order to “avoid the explicit fixing of identities” supposedly evident in mainstream leadership courses (Ford & Harding, 2008, p. 476). The Catalyst Programme did not seem to initiate sustained discussion about ethics, morality, power, ideology, or social justice as “heavier” CMS projects would instigate.

Given the Catalyst Programme is critically orientated, how can this type of leadership development be destabilising? Whilst there are only a few studies detailing the consequences of living with a critical mindset, Brookfield (1994) argues that critical reflection can be unsettling, disruptive, fear-provoking, and isolating. Students may feel a loss of innocence and a terrifying feeling of being in limbo (Brookfield, 1994). It can make a person doubt their self-worth, and therefore their confidence to question instructors, and may make them feel a resentment or hostility to their once taken-for-granted context (Reynolds, 1999). As critical reflection involves the dismantling of one’s ideas and assumptions once held as true, it can

result in “profound anxiety and a loss of the sense of identity which those earlier beliefs had supported (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992b)” (Reynolds, 1999, p. 179). Gabriel (2009) is concerned with the “downside” to criticism and how both fair and unfair criticism can destroy a “theory, a process, or a person in their early stages of development” (p. 382). In describing this downside, he uses language such as “killed”, “discouraged or devastated”, “destructive”, “undermine”, “painful”, “harmful”, “envy, hate or resentment”, and “deeply troubling” (p. 382). This language is similar to that used in the “cut apart” discourse (“blowing everything to smithereens”, “pulling you apart”, “killing”, “assassin”, “destruction”, “knife”), suggesting that this discourse may represent the downside of critically orientated leadership development.

We see evidence of the unsettling effects of criticality in the “cut apart” discourse, where Oscar talks about the “pain” of “not liking” parts of who he is (p. 175). Others are struggling because they “can’t cling to anything” as their “foundations” have been “dissolved” (p. 175). Identity fragmentation and disintegration is also evident in the “shake up” discourse where Ben’s almost completed jigsaw has been tipped “upside down” and pieces have been “replaced”, leaving him uncertain about how to “put it all back together” (p. 169). The isolating aspect of criticality is also evident in Alistair’s reaction to being challenged, as he says he is “climbing up the ice wall” on his own whilst his cluster members “got the chair lift together” (p. 159). However, receiving or witnessing critical efforts can also fire and fuel people, as evidenced in Michael’s impassioned “disgust” reaction to Leah’s posting (p. 180). Some people also feel hopeful in the face of being deconstructed, as Ben believes that there are certainly some “benefits”, even if he is not entirely sure what they are.

Due to the destabilising potential of critical encounters, Gabriel (2009) suggests that an ethic of care should be present. This idea of an ethic of care is less developed in Gabriel’s paper; therefore, it is necessary to turn to other writers who have shaped this concept. The term

ethics of care is believed to have been coined by developmental psychologist Gilligan in the 1980s, and since then has attracted a stream of feminist orientated research, as well as some non-feminist work (Noddings, 2003). With these feminist roots, an ethics of care develops a way of living that conceives of humans as essentially dependent on each other, rather than autonomous and separate, and therefore it explores one's responsibility in relationships (Noddings, 2003). That is, an ethic of care is interested in "how people sustain fragile networks of relations that allow people to grow and prosper, developing trust, respect and responsibility for each other" (Gabriel, 2009, p. 383). Noddings (1990) argues that the desire to be cared for is fundamental to human life, and therefore she argues that we move between moments of being cared for and moments of caring for others: we are not interminably stuck in either one of these roles, although some feminists argue that females are more likely to be fixed in the exploitative role of being the care-giver (Hoagland, 1990).

It appears that there is a connection between an ethics of care and social constructionism, as both hold an attentiveness to emotions, relationality, fluidity, and practice (Held, 2006). As the Atlas Institute uses a social constructionist approach to leadership development, they too emphasise this idea of "concern and connectedness between persons" (Held, 2006, p. 42), which one facilitator described as akin to each person holding an end of a rubber band which both parties need to be keep taut, to avoid it slackening or snapping. Many of the residential workshops and assignments focused on how to connect with people (i.e. concepts such as sense-making, and searching for others' perspectives; and assignments such as "engaging in conversations with other people in your world who matter"). The participants often expressed their feelings of belonging, solidarity, and even love, which one facilitator describes as "connection, relationship, friendship, togetherness, support and affiliation" amongst the group.

Whilst some emerging leadership development articles describe how an ethic of care has been developed in educational leaders (Gerstl-Pepin, Killeen, & Hasazi, 2006), and African-American leaders (Bass, 2009), there is a dearth of research that explicitly builds a connection between leadership development and an ethic of care. Ford and Harding (2008) argue that leadership development participants are “given a new vocabulary” in their training, the “language of an organization that should care” (p. 487). This may give them “different possibilities of being”, in order to become “caring leaders” in a “caring organization” (p. 488). Participants therefore seem to be receivers of the programme’s language of care, where care is a discourse or vocabulary that can offer different identities. The authors do not talk about how development itself needs to exhibit an ethic of care alongside the criticality which these authors promote.

There appear to be some cross-overs between care/criticality, and construction/undoing. Using similar words to Alvesson and Willmott’s (2002) definition of identity work, Tronto (1993) describes that care is “everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (p. 103). Activities that involve creation, destruction, fulfilling a desire, or playing are seen as not involving caring (Tronto, 1993). This suggests that an ethic of care is similar to the construction and maintenance practices of identity work and could be used to temper the presence of undoing (which can involve creation, destruction, and play). On the other hand, critical reflection involves “disconfirmation and discontinuity” rather than the “incremental acquisition of ideas and information” (Reynolds, 1999, p. 181), suggesting that criticality is central to undoing rather than construction.

Gabriel (2009) argues that the existence of “care without criticism” can “destroy learning” (p. 384). I propose that a leadership development programme that has “care without criticism” may not create any undoing or significant changes for the participants. If there is any undoing

present, it is more likely to be in the form of floundering because the participants who experienced floundering seemed to do so because they were not being questioned or challenged enough (“I don't think that there is a lot of challenging and questioning going on”). It seems some participants recognise the importance of criticism in their development, which is why they ask each other to stop being so “nice and polite” and to instead “fire away at me” and “push me”.

On the other hand, “uncaring critique” or criticism without care can also “destroy learning” (Gabriel, 2009, p. 384). Perhaps the “cut apart” form of undoing comes closest to criticism without care for some participants – although what is felt and perceived as care appears to differ across people. For example, Michael felt that Leah’s posting (p. 180) was the “antithesis” of the “open and supportive”, “positive and helpful” (i.e. caring) environment that the programme should create. Leah, on the other hand, sees “throwing someone a shock” as trying to help someone “grow and develop”. Alistair’s emotional reaction (p. 159) can be understood as him feeling uncared for when he was challenged and critiqued. This is perhaps why he feels lonely and isolated from his cluster who he believes should have stood up for him. The absence of care may cause the fragile relationships between facilitators and participants to blow apart, and parties may become “deeply cynical” (Gabriel, 2009, p. 384). Without holding care alongside criticality, leadership development programmes may risk becoming more like the T-Groups which preceded them, and were eventually abandoned amidst concerns that they were destructive and dangerous (Kaplan, 1986).

However, I am not advocating that caring and criticality are conflicting behaviours or mindsets. While care and criticality could be placed at opposite poles, it could be that the two overlap more than initially expected. Thayer-Bacon (1993) argues that in order to be a good critical thinker one must also care, where caring means to respect and value the other person, to be receptive to their response, and to become more acquainted with them as a result.

Tronto (1993) believes that a society functioning with an ethic of care can rethink inequalities of power and privilege. It seems therefore that care can have a similar aim to some critically informed projects. In addition, Brookfield (1994) describes how people who endure the strains of critical learning feel more connected to others in the group who have had similar experiences, and create an “emotionally sustaining peer learning community” (p. 212), where they feel truly understood and supported. This could go some way toward explaining the belonging and solidarity many participants felt a part of.

There are discourses of undoing that may represent the coalescing of an ethic of care and criticism. In classrooms where an ethic of care is balanced with an ethic of criticism, Gabriel (2009) believes that “there is a real sense of discovery, of excitement, and even exhilaration” (p. 384). This language is similar to that used by participants who feel shaken up or opened up, suggesting that these discourses hold promising avenues for where care and criticality can meet in identity work and development. The interaction in the Emerald cluster (pp. 170-1) shows this mixture of care and criticism playing out – and the fragility of this tension. Rob responds to Natasha’s invitation for critique (“I want to be challenged more”) by posing a series of identity questions to the group. Derek appears somewhat threatened and defensive (“are you suggesting Rob that this course is not for me?”), signalling that the fragility of the relationship could disintegrate here as he seems to feel not cared for. The interaction between Rob and Derek affirms this care again (“I like you too much”; “I like you too don’t worry buddy”). It could be that the calm of settling, which follows the chaos of shaking, is where an ethic of care becomes visible. Although, in this example, by being soothed with care, Derek does not seem to engage strongly with the critical questions, suggesting the difficulty of holding care without diffusing the need to engage with criticality.

The interaction between Diane and Leah (pp. 152–3) exemplifies the weaving of care and criticality in a facilitation approach. Leah couches her “killer questions” in statements such as

“there’s nothing wrong with being a baker”, “there’s not even the hint of criticism here”, whilst she offers her a challenge to experiment with her identity. Faced with this kind of post, Diane seems to feel safe enough to talk honestly about her concerns and reluctance with taking up this challenge, and does not ignore or deflect it. It seems therefore that the presence of care is what could keep shaking up a “beautiful thing” rather than being destructive (i.e. becoming cut apart). The practice of “catching oneself” to avoid the destructive self-talk of slipping back into old identities also offers an avenue for enacting both care and criticality. Catching oneself appears to correspond with the tenets of caring which involve a responsibility towards relationships with others, and being attentive to other people to protect them from falling into destructive mindsets or identities.

The centrality of unequal and dependent binary relationships such as mother-child and teacher-student in ethics of care theory is problematic (Hoagland, 1990). The dominant dualisms of parent/child and teacher/student in Gabriel’s writing indicate certain powered relationships, where one is apparently privileged with more power, expertise, and authority than the other – where one is the “doer” and the other is the “receiver” of both care and critique. For example, Gabriel (2009) suggests that the teacher has the “mantle of the carer” (p. 383), implying that caring is something that is “done to” the student, and that the educator is the one who sparks critical behaviours. This receiver/giver binary stands in contrast to Noddings’ (1990) argument that we each move between moments of receiving and giving, which goes some way toward deconstructing the static and simplistic binary. Following Noddings then, the participant has a responsibility to contribute to the existence of caring – and I would also argue, criticism. The facilitator Cassandra is uncomfortable with being positioned in a static binary of receiver/giver as she appears unwilling to accept her role as “holding the knife” in the “cut apart” discourse; rather, she wants to be seen as being “side by side” with the participants (p. 175). The institute’s facilitators seem wary of constructing

themselves as parents or “holding the knife”, yet if participants seem to position them as such then perhaps the facilitators need to address the social, cultural, and historical traditions that may establish this position, rather than rushing to deny it.

There is room to rework this power-dependency relationship, as Gabriel (2009) notes that an ethic of care is about developing a “responsibility for each other” (p. 383). This suggests that other figures, not just the teacher/facilitator/parent, have a role in negotiating this care and criticality tension. That is, participants are responsible for other participants, the facilitators, and themselves. Facilitators too may need to make their care for each other more visible. This raises questions as to why some participants seem to position themselves as a passive receiver of both care and criticism: why do they place the responsibility of being undone or critiqued in another person’s hands? What are the consequences of expecting someone to hold the gun/knife? The facilitator Leah seems to caution the participant Jeremy about this mindset, saying, “don’t hand that responsibility of pulling you apart to someone else [...] It’s great to get input into how others are seeing you, but remember it’s only one limited perspective in the end” (p. 176). Furthermore, participants need to be questioned about their request to be helped “back on track” once they have been “thrown off” it – especially as some participants criticise the facilitators for trying to “re-form” participants to their liking. In addition, how do facilitators negotiate these invitations to “fire away at us” when some facilitators seem uncomfortable “holding the knife”? Perhaps the reason why Michael responded in “disgust” to Leah’s “throwing a shock” was because it transgresses her role as the carer. Therefore, perhaps the facilitators need to consider how they can care and critique, how they can “hold the knife” and “stand side by side” with the participants – not one or the other, and not denying their role as both. It seems necessary to spend time constructing these roles with the participants, and acknowledging that each facilitator has a responsibility to perform these roles, as do the participants. The facilitators also need to consider the implications of

initiating moments of criticality, as Reynolds' (1999) suggests such moments may create self-doubt and reduce the participants' confidence and ability to question the facilitators – a consequence that seems especially concerning on a leadership development programme that aims to build the capacity to question.

Tronto (1993) argues that those who receive care may have different ideas about their needs than the care-givers. In my empirical material, there were participants calling for care, others calling for criticality, and some calling for both. This variation is what makes this tension a difficult one for facilitators. Those participants who want care may feel the need to repair, maintain, or boost their identity, and may be the ones who see development programmes as needing to offer a “safe”, “supportive”, and “positive” environment. As they perceive criticality as devoid of caring, they react in “disgust” and attempt to care and protect those who have been challenged. Perhaps it is necessary for constructionist leadership development programmes aiming to build a capacity for criticality that they spend time discussing the relationship between being critical and caring, or other language like support and challenge, and constructing what these terms mean for the group, seeing as they can vastly differ.

It could be that this tension between care and criticality is central to leadership as well, although the leadership literature has not explored such a connection in great detail yet. In a brief two-page reflection entitled “Leadership and the ethics of care”, Ciulla (2009) argues that “the job of a leader includes caring for others or taking responsibility for them” (p. 3). Leaders should “care for their followers, especially in times of crisis” (p. 3). She describes care not just as an “emotional concern about the well-being of others” but also as an “attention to one's duty”, where just the “presence” of a leader can give followers great “confidence” and “comfort”. This leads Ciulla to finish with the statement: “a leader's job is to be in the right place and paying attention to the right things” (p. 4). If we understand an ethic of care as a way of being in the world that recognises interdependent relationships, then

Ciulla's connection between leadership and the ethics of care needs to be built in a way that positions leadership as a relationship between people in which both parties engage in this ethics of care – rather than it being the sole domain of a leader giving to their followers. What is meant by caring could also perhaps be strengthened from this assumption that it is the mere “presence” of a leader in the “right place”. Therefore, it seems necessary to reframe what care means in broader leadership literature.

In conclusion, this chapter began by confirming that undoing is a visible phenomenon that occurs in some organisational settings. My data validate the different ways in which undoing is currently understood across various literatures, and also extends our understanding of what undoing entails by including the various movements of slipping back, floundering, and playful experimentation.

I then “undo” this idea of undoing by deconstructing three binaries that seem to pervade the data. The first of these pinpoints the signified absence in this thesis, construction, and argues that forms of undoing do not exist outside of other identity work movements like construction. Rather, the existence of one is predicated upon the other, and therefore it is impossible for undoing to take place without raising notions of construction and consolidation. Based on this proposition, I suggest a series of implications for those involved in leadership development practice.

Another central binary opposition in leadership development is the relationship between facilitators and participants. I use this relationship in order to explore how the discourses vary in terms of performance and passivity (another binary in itself). Participants appear more able to enact the discourses “opening up”, “letting go”, “floundering”, and “slipping back”; however, they seem to struggle with initiating or sustaining shaking up, cutting apart, and identity play behaviours, which the facilitators seem more likely to model. Such a finding

suggests that developing playful, provocative, and critical leadership could be obstructed by the positioning of participants and facilitators in terms of how active or passive they are in taking up these various undoing discourses. Therefore, I suggest the facilitator/participant binary may need to be reinvented to allow for both actors to move between the responsibilities and behaviours of each role.

The final binary, care/criticality, speaks to fragile tensions such as shaking/settling, construction/destruction, and fragment/whole that strike at the heart of undoing and leadership development. Drawing on Yiannis Gabriel's reflections (2009), it seems that leadership development programmes that promote and model critical thinking and undoing forms of identity work need to combine this approach with an ethic of care in order to mitigate the potentially destructive and debilitating effects of enacting, receiving, and witnessing criticism. It seems that the undoing discourse "shaking up" best reflects the coalescing of care and criticality. This word "care" may conjure up connotations of warm and fuzzy niceties; however, I use it here to refer to the responsibilities involved in developmental relationships. This definition is problematic as responsibility is often prefixed by the words "to take", thus reconnecting us to unhelpful binaries such as taker/giver, mother/child, carer/cared for, which underpin the ethics of care, and ultimately the leadership development literature. Using this binary, I suggest a range of implications for leadership development facilitators and participants in terms of how they co-construct and converse about the importance of both care and criticality. The final concluding chapter will focus more explicitly on these contributions to leadership development practice and academic literature.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has its origins in my curiosity about how and why individuals work upon their identities in leadership development programmes. This interest led me to offer the concept of undoing as a new and significant form of identity work. As I near the end of this thesis, I am left with the responsibility to summarise the main contributions which it makes to both literature and practice. My primary contributions to identity research and leadership development research lie with this concept of undoing, as well as the ways in which it intersects with care and criticality. This conclusion chapter outlines both of these aspects as well as contributions to practice, the limitations of this thesis, and possible avenues for future research.

Theoretical Contributions

This thesis contends that the majority of identity scholarship in organisation studies tends to focus upon processes of construction, acquisition, maintenance, and regulation, and only fleetingly mentions how identity work can involve discarding, deconstruction, and playful experimentation. I foreground these marginal voices through the concept of undoing. In doing so, I address the call for more research that explores “the different kinds of identity work conducted within identity workspaces”, especially in long-term leadership development programmes (J. L. Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 55). Whilst I am certain that there is more to undoing than this thesis portrays, my research describes undoing as involving moments of one’s identity being opened or loosened up, helplessly floundering, playing with multiple identities, being shaken up, feeling cut apart, letting go aspects of one’s identity, and slipping back into old identities. My analysis shows how facilitators or participants work with these discourses of undoing differently: some are shouldered with the responsibility of initiating them, whilst others are more inclined to be on the receiving end of another’s efforts. It seems

necessary therefore for identity researchers to closely examine the disjunctures between who is inviting, initiating, enacting, and deflecting identity work discourses, how various parties are positioned in regard to them, and the consequences for power and dependency dynamics.

My thesis contributes to the field of leadership development research by challenging the mainstream assumption that development follows a linear progression from immaturity to maturity. Such an interpretation is exemplified in the following quote mentioned in chapter 1 where leadership development refers to “almost every form of *growth* or *stage* of development in the life cycle that *promotes, encourages, and assists* [emphasis added] in one’s leadership potential” (Brungardt, 1997, p. 83), in which learning journeys along an “ordered *hierarchical sequence* of increasing complexity [emphasis added]” (Roberts, 1981, as cited in Brungardt, 1997, p. 83). Instead of picturing an individual’s development as an ascending arrow, I suggest that a more useful image is of a coiled spring. The coils of the spring symbolise the movement between different binaries evident in undoing and development, such as settling and shaking, letting go and slipping back, growth and deconstruction. Movement can be backwards and forwards, rather than incremental progression. The spring may become fatigued, stretched, or even close to snapping. This image may speak more precisely to the experience of participants, who seemed to struggle at times with losing momentum, feeling stagnant, and creating motivation. The idea that development and identity work operates as a series of forward steps is an unhelpful and unrealistic expectation for participants on long-term programmes to hold, as one of the challenges of leadership is to work with different levels and forms of energy and movement. Therefore, it is more useful for development programmes to acknowledge and support this understanding, instead of assuming a ladder-like model.

In addition, this thesis contributes to the emerging field of critical and constructionist leadership development approaches. Firstly, this research would benefit from using language

that allows for many practices and movements of identity work to be explored, rather than focusing on more narrow terms. That is, if identity is indeed such a nebulous topic, the field would be better served by using rich and contradictory terms that encapsulate the multitude of different ways in which identity work can be experienced. Rather than searching strictly for evidence of identity construction, maintenance, or regulation, researchers should be open to unexpected processes that contest these. Alternately, researchers could follow the lead of Carroll and Levy (2010) and Beech (2011) who examine one term, namely construction, and highlight a range of different practices contained within it (i.e. in Beech's case, experimentation, recognition, and reflection). Furthermore, this thesis cautions against pitting these different identity work processes against one another, and assuming that they are separate and distinct. Rather, each process, be it construction, undoing, regulation and so on, "inhabit[s] each other" (Cooper, 1989, p. 483). Rather than cleaving analytical lines between the various ways in which identity work can be experienced, we should explore the way that undoing plays out alongside, after, and before moments of regulation, construction, maintenance, and various other practices. Such a project speaks to the commotion of doing identity work and would provide new lines of inquiry to prevent identity studies becoming repetitive and irrelevant.

When I presented this research to a group of CMS researchers, one of the comments was that I should focus solely on the "cut apart" or identity destruction discourse, as the term undoing dilutes the force of this process. While I can see the attraction of a term like "identity destruction" to CMS audiences, undoing offers a more nuanced and varied conceptualisation of identity work, and one that honours, rather than dilutes, the complexity of doing identity work in leadership development settings. I am weary of demonising leadership development programmes and facilitators as entirely negative, damaging, and oppressive as some CMS researchers may prefer, as it is a simplistic and misleading representation of what is a multi-

faceted setting. Therefore, I challenge CMS researchers to explore, rather than ignore, the variety of both positive and harmful identity work processes that exist in leadership development as it seems a more beneficial means of contributing to knowledge and practice.

In addition, this thesis contributes to constructionist leadership development research by questioning the static positing of selves as subjects or objects. Such research tends to maintain an oppositional relationship between the self as constructed subject (Carroll & Levy, 2010), or the self as a regulated object (Gagnon, 2008). Through the use of undoing, I show how both moments of agentic identity searching (i.e. opening up and playing with different identities), as well as moments of feeling disciplined or shaped (i.e. “cut apart”), can be experienced within the same setting, and by the same individual. Therefore, I ask whether constructionist leadership development research is willing to explore how participants and facilitators have moments of being both a subject and an object, of being constructed and regulated. It could be that the excitement and anxiety, the joy and the pain, of identity work is a result of moving between moments of feeling like a subject or an object. Such a project reflects a more relational view of power in which subjects move between both doing and being done to (Newton, 1998).

The tension between care and criticality represents another contribution to the leadership development literature. I argue that leadership development programmes should engage in both behaviours of care (which could look like the support, encouragement, building, and assistance favoured by functionalist and constructivist literature), as well as develop and practise the capacity to critique (advocated by some constructionist research). I suspect that without either of these behaviours it is unlikely that enduring and meaningful learning and development will take place. The “shaking up” discourse is one form of undoing in which both care and criticality coalesce and produce a stimulating, energising, and surprising experience for the participants – and perhaps also the facilitators. It is the presence of care in

this discourse that keeps it from becoming the more destructive discourse “cut apart”. However, if too much care is shown, it may diffuse the poignancy and effect of criticism, and therefore the learning opportunity, thus indicating the difficulty of balancing care and criticism. Although this idea of care is not well developed in leadership or management education literature, the key aspect of both care and criticality seems to centre on holding a responsibility in relationships. In terms of undoing, this entails a responsibility to engage in both behaviours rather than expecting another person to “pull you apart” and put you back together again, to acknowledge rather than deny your role in critiquing efforts, to question the existence of more debilitating forms of undoing, and to know how to blend care with critique so that one throws a “shock” rather than a “grenade”.

However, this idea of responsibility is complicated by the assumption in leadership development literature that the facilitators have “the mantle of the carer” (Gabriel, 2009, p. 383) and should be “the good enough mother” (Dubouloy, 2004, p. 477). This position suggests that the facilitator is the “giver” (of responsibility, of care, of criticism), and the participant is the “taker”. I suspect that this assumption goes some way toward explaining why some participants “hand that responsibility of pulling you apart to someone else” (p. 176). This echoes Ciulla’s assumption (2009) that it is the “job of the leader” to “car[e] for others or tak[e] responsibility” (p. 3) for the follower, rather than foster mutual responsibilities between the two. Therefore, in order to better understand how leadership development balances an ethic of care with criticism, it is necessary to investigate how responsibility is relinquished and taken up by facilitators and participants.

Finally, leadership development research would benefit from more research that focuses on interactions between participants and facilitators. If constructionist researchers continue to see leadership and its development as relational, then we need to use methods that allow us to explore this assumption. Whilst I appreciate the difficulty of publishing interactions in

academic journals, leadership researchers such as Crevani and colleagues (2010) and Larsson and Lundholm (2010) offer promising examples. Using interactions enable researchers to trace how identity work is created and experienced relationally and in-the-moment, rather than relying upon interview constructions of previous interactions.

Practical Contributions

I also offer some contributions to the practice of leadership development. First of all, I hope this thesis may encourage those involved in programme design and delivery who see development as construction, acquisition, and maintenance to consider their absent other – that is, how development could also work with undoing productively. Likewise, for those developers who comfortably operate with this undoing stance, it could be worthwhile to consider how they build in moments of consolidation, protection, and comfort to help participants and facilitators endure the recursive movements between shaking and settling. A broader question here asks whether leadership development programmes should focus on repairing or stabilising identities? Should leadership development programmes be “places of retreat to which we flee” (Scott, 2010, p. 213) in order to consolidate or repair fragile identities, and if so, what value and impact do such programmes offer?

Secondly, as I have offered several descriptions of how undoing can manifest, I hope this thesis provides more clarity around what kind(s) of undoing are or are not present in a programme – and how the more debilitating ones can be worked with. Undoing does not appear to unfold in a series of consequential stages; rather, participants may be experiencing different types of undoing at the same time in the programme. Therefore, facilitators need to be adept at working simultaneously with various forms of undoing. Thirdly, it seems important that facilitators examine their role in undoing: what discourses they promote/discourage; how they position themselves and participants in these discourses (and

how participants position the facilitators); and how they can work with power and dependency dynamics to reshape the responsibility that participants have in these discourses.

I would also like to offer a series of propositions to participants, or those thinking of enlisting in a leadership development programme. It seems to me that those participants who have wanted an experience that nurtures, cushions, and affirms their identity have not shown a noticeable difference in their leadership, in terms of the way they interact, make sense of, or navigate situations. Often, these are people who have ignored and deflected shaking up efforts by other people. My question here is, if a participant wants a “nice and supportive” (p. 180) environment, yet they also want to develop their leadership ability, how does one expect such development to happen without engaging in undoing or criticality? This thesis also challenges participants on the assumption that they are there to experience the delight and surprise of receiving an undoing attempt by someone else (mainly the facilitators), rather than build their capacity to move between actively receiving and initiating, which seems a capacity more akin to post-heroic forms of leadership (Jackson & Parry, 2008). A more critical interpretation would ask why the participants do not seem to question some of the undoing discourses, such as letting go of an expert identity. It seems contradictory that participants are encouraged to be more critical in their leadership and to question taken-for-granted assumptions, yet they struggle to apply this criticality to the leadership development setting.

Finally, this thesis raises questions for organisations that use leadership development programmes. If we accept that undoing happens on some leadership programmes – particularly critical or constructionist orientated ones – then there may be some debilitating and painful outcomes for employees. How prepared are organisations for this process and its outcomes? If organisations hold the mainstream view that development is a series of stages or hierarchical steps to betterment, how are they able to support employees who are actually

experiencing a rollercoaster of peaks and troughs? It could also be that the outcomes of undoing are not in the best interests of the organisation: for example, participant-employees may attempt to undo their peers and subordinates in quite debilitating ways, or the participant who is relinquishing their expert identity (i.e. as an engineer) may be at odds with the technical expectations of the organisation, or the “undone” participant may feel disillusioned, cynical, resentful, or distanced from their job and/or organisation. In addition, given that many participants found it difficult to communicate what was happening on the programme, the question becomes how aware is the organisation of the activities and intentions of the programme? Finally, following this tension between care and criticality, what responsibility does the organisation have in the leadership development programme?

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

It is with humility that I now acknowledge some of the limitations of this thesis, and I follow them with suggestions for future research. Firstly, the particular programme I researched allowed me to explore a group of participants that leadership development research traditionally overlooks; however, it is not without its constraints. It could be that processes of identity undoing are more visible amongst these younger (20–30-year-old) emerging leaders as they have a sense of innocence, freedom, and exploration that senior executives may be less willing to reveal. It could therefore be worthwhile for further research to explore how undoing manifests in senior executive leadership development programmes.

Secondly, this programme has drawn participants from across multiple organisations rather than being confined to a “closed” programme centring on employees in one organisation. This may have allowed a certain freedom and trust amongst participants to be able to experience and talk about undoing and identity. Future research could focus on a closed/in-house programme, combined with observations of participants in their workplaces, in order to

explore in more detail the cross over between the programme and the organisation, especially in regards to undoing/construction and care/criticality.

My data collection is restricted in two other ways: the type of research participants, and the time period of the fieldwork. That is, I have collected the voices of programme participants and facilitators, and have not broadened this pool to include individuals outside of the programme, such as the participants' peers, subordinates, and superiors. Leadership development research may benefit from including multiple points of contact from within and outside the programme, in order to further explore questions regarding the transferability of identity work and learning from the programme to other contexts. In addition, my fieldwork ended at the same time as the programme. Future research may wish to perform follow-up interviews and observations at workplaces with a selection of participants, to investigate the durability of identity work undertaken during the programme.

Finally, I am aware that the programme and provider I researched could be classed as an extreme case, given their constructionist and critical orientation. This restricts my ability to speak confidently about mainstream leadership development programmes. Therefore, it would be interesting to research a functionalist or constructivist programme in order to compare how undoing manifests (or is suppressed) in such a setting.

Some interesting areas of future research arise from my own curiosity rather than the project's limitations. I am interested in further exploring the identity work of facilitators, and specifically if and how they experience undoing. There appears to be a dearth of research regarding the facilitators of leadership development programmes – especially research that is not written by a facilitator (cf. Ford & Harding, 2008; Sinclair, 2009). Whilst the identity work of facilitators is made less visible in programmes, the “cut apart” discourse shows that they are not immune. If my research is indicative of the tensions, emotions, and expectations

which facilitators negotiate, then I imagine this could be a worthwhile research project, as long as they are not narrowly framed as the all-powerful “undoers”, but rather the intricacies of power and relationality are allowed to be explored.

Furthermore, it seems that the field of leadership development could experiment with different framings of the facilitators, which move away from the “good enough mother” role (Dubouloy, 2004, p. 477). Such an image amplifies the carer role of facilitators in which they help the participant deal with their identity transitions through “conferring blessings, giving advice, embodying new possibilities, and, most important, believing in his or her ‘dream’” (Ibarra et al., 2010, p. 671). Rather, I suggest exploring other metaphors which symbolise care, but are not predicated on psychodynamics, and blending these with constructionist accounts of facilitation that describe facilitators as a “disruptor”, “catalyst”, and bringing “energy, power and disruption” (Kennedy, Carroll, Francoeur, & Jackson, in press). One way in which I could empirically explore this question is to analyse the final six months of the programme when the facilitators withdrew their involvement. This material may indicate the behaviours, roles, and identities the participants took up (or neglected) that are usually occupied by the facilitators. It may also be useful to understand why some participants struggled to let go of the facilitators, and why this stage of the programme contained few development opportunities for them.

Furthermore, in an attempt to connect with mainstream leadership development literature, I wonder how an evaluation of constructionist leadership development programmes could be performed. If identity is a primary target for development in these programmes (Carroll & Levy, 2010), how we could go about an evaluation project if we assume that experiencing both undoing and construction, care and criticality are central to a meaningful, translatable, and potentially sustainable form of leadership development?

I suggest that the care/criticality tension is relevant not only to leadership development practice, but also for doing critically orientated research of leadership development. In my fieldwork experience, I was struck by the inclination of some facilitators to protect the participants from the gaze of an external researcher, especially one who may be bringing a critical lens to their research. This has been a precarious and at times awkward tension for me to negotiate: maintaining a commitment to critically informed research, but without sabotaging or disturbing what Gabriel (2009) quite rightly describes as fragile relationships. Therefore, CMS researchers could further theorise how one maintains an ethic of care alongside an ethic of criticism in the research process, a project which Ekman's doctoral thesis (2010) initiates in what she calls an "analytics of compassion".

In addition, I am interested in exploring whether this concept of undoing exists in organisational settings other than leadership development programmes. Organisational theorists such as Van Maanen, Schein, and Ibarra have used concepts that play at the edges of undoing, suggesting that processes of undoing may exist in organisations more broadly. I wonder if undoing – both undoing others and becoming undone – could be a familiar experience for people engaging in leadership in organisations. It seems to resonate with managerial identity literature and the fragmentation, anxiety, and struggles of their identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Watson, 1994). Furthermore, as undoing seems to be an intensely emotional experience, it could also be used to contribute to theory regarding the social construction of emotions, which researchers like Sturdy and colleagues (2006) believe needs to be built more strongly. The various forms of undoing incite emotions such as hope, excitement, fear, disappointment, loss, pain, doubt, confidence, love, anger, and so on, making it a rich palate for exploring a variety of emotions. Given the interest surrounding the nature of anxiety and insecurity in organisations and

leadership development (Collinson, 2003; Gagnon, 2008), undoing may be one way of explaining the existence and experience of these two emotions.

Lastly, this thesis suggests that the popular social constructionist perspective of identity needs to be submitted to more critical inquiry. It seems one thing for researchers, writers, facilitators, and perhaps organisations to promote a view of identity as multiple, fluid, experimental, and agentic, yet my data suggest that people have a real reticence and inability to confidently enact this identity work in a way that translates from talking into being. This is a finding recently mirrored in Beech's (2011) study of identity work, in which his research participants also had "little success in experimental identity work" (p. 299). If constructionist leadership development programmes prioritise this form of identity work, yet participants have a real difficulty in doing it, it is a topic demanding more empirical investigation. The "play" discourse section is one which feels unresolved for me as I finish this thesis, and one which I think needs to be explored by researchers who are more cautious of buying into these social constructionist assumptions – yet who have an appreciation of them (and perhaps use them in their research as well). One way of doing this is to explore the connections between binaries such as multiple/singular, fixed/fluid, playful/static rather than casting them as irreconcilable opposites. Such research could explore how identity can be both "fixed and stable" and "fluid, uncertain – in movement, 'becoming' or radically decentred" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1167).

Closing Statement

I draw this thesis to a close with a rejoinder to the quote from Judith Butler (2004) that I previously presented in chapter 3.

We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also

be that despite one's best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. (p. 19).

Butler's words seem even more poignant to me now having come to the end. When I came across her quote, I imagined how her words could hold some resonance, but now, after exploring the depths and heights of undoing, I realise the magnitude of what she is saying. I am both grateful and relieved that she is able to articulate what undoing really means to this thesis, and to me. The experiences of my research participants mirror Butler's belief that undoing is inherently relational, "we're undone by each other". The numerous interactions which I have been fortunate to capture and recite here attest to this: from the collective floundering, to participants telling each other what to let go of, to facilitators "throwing a shock"; undoing is undeniably brought into existence "in the face of the other". The complicating factor here is that people can lump the power to undo in the hands of another, rather than take up their responsibility in the process. There are participants and facilitators on the programme who may have never anticipated becoming undone, and yet in various interactions they realised "one does not always stay intact . . . despite one's best efforts". I trust that my thesis has captured the various ways one's intactness can be dismantled, and has also explored what it is like to live with the damage to this intactness – be it energising, surprising, debilitating, or painful. But the words from the quote which I will never forget are those that read "And if we're not [being undone], we're missing something". Because in all those desperate and delightful moments when this thesis journey has unravelled my sense of intactness, those comforting words remind me that this is what it means to live and to learn.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Overview of the Catalyst Programme

Appendix B. Required Readings on the Catalyst Programme

Appendix C. Participant Information Sheet (Facilitator/Participant)

Appendix D. Participant Information Sheet (CEO)

Appendix E. Consent Form (Facilitator/Participant)

Appendix F. Consent Form (CEO)

Appendix G. Summary of Discourses and Key Analytical Questions

Appendix A. Overview of the Catalyst Programme

	Date	Purpose	Key concepts/language	Activities
Pre-residential period	1 July – 15 July 2008	N/A	N/A	*Programme Application Form *Leadership Footprint assignment *Readings
Residential 1	16 – 18 July 2009	“Exploring Leadership Worlds”	*Exploring leadership worlds *Killer Questioning *Wicked/tame problems (Grint, 2005) *Command/management/ leadership (Grint, 2005) *Identity and identity work	*Working with stories, metaphors, and images *Practising killer questioning *Visiting hospital (different leadership world) *Connecting with their clusters *Individual reflective practice
Intersession 1	19 July – 2nd October 2009	“Exploring Leadership Worlds”	*Killer questioning *Story telling	*Write a story about a challenging leadership adventure/experience that occurred in a group *Share story with cluster * Cluster peers practise killer questioning on this story * Specify a key insight arising from this story and question process that the person wants to explore at next residential (with the support of their peers)
Residential 2 (Outdoor Education Centre)	3 – 7 October 2009	“Leadership Between People”	*Moving between the balcony and the dance floor (Heifetz) *Searching for multiple perspectives *Being present in interactions *Sense-making in action/in the moment *Meaning and interpretation	*Raft-building *Overnight tramp and camp *All day bush walk *Sailing *Rogaine challenge *Collective debriefing/sense-making

			is collectively and continually shaped (not fixed, static, individual)	
Intersession 2	8 October 2009 – 23 January 2010	“Leadership in Relationship”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *“Engaging in conversations with other people in your world who matter” *Dealing with the known/unknown *Working with leadership edges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *“Consolidating the Known”: each cluster negotiates what they hold in common in terms of leadership experience/knowledge/context, and also the gaps/cracks/disconnects, unknowns and differences *“Seeking the Unknown”: Have conversations with people outside the cluster who can speak to these gaps *“Locating a Leadership Edge/ Crack/Space”: From these conversations, cluster identifies an exciting “edge” they would like to explore in their leadership development together
Residential 3	24 – 26 January 2010	“Shaping Leadership Space”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Interrogating assumptions (own and other people’s) *Framing/reframing *Boundaries in thinking *Seeing new spaces, ways of being and seeing *Identity/identity work *Experimentation *Conflict as a source of “leadership fuel” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Each cluster presents their leadership edge from Intersession 2 *Community Project: two clusters join together to work with representative from an external organisation about a “wicked” problem they are dealing with
Intersession 3	27 January – 9 June 2010	“Shaping Leadership Space”	Experimentation projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Developing the cluster edge from Residential 3: framing/reframing it, “boundary work” *Share edge with another cluster – killer questioning, reflecting back their

				<p>assumptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Doing experiments that help the cluster test/explore the edge *“Going to the balcony” and making sense of the experiments so far, then designing and performing more experiments *“Sense-making” and “convergence”: Pulling together as a cluster the experiences from this intersession *Complete individual development snapshot
Residential 4	10 – 12 June 2010	“Being in Leadership”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Identity *Known/unknown *Smoke and crystal metaphor *Drop your tools *Way-finding, being a compass not a map *Sense making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Present to a panel of external guests the experiment process undertaken in intersession 3, with the aim of including guests in an engaged conversation about the leadership “edge” *Sense-making of cluster experience over last 12 months *Bringing to the forefront the leadership challenges in their non-programme contexts: connecting their leadership challenge to a large story about “passion, aspiration, vitality, purpose, love” *Share this story with non-cluster participants, who listen, draw a point from the story, and offer it with a killer question to the storyteller in a supportive manner
Intersession 4	13 June – 1 December 2010	“Being in Leadership”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Way-finding *Journeying as a group without the facilitators (for the final 6 months the facilitators took a step back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Write and submit a “Travel Plan” that charts the questions, unknowns, edges etc. each individual is going to journey with for the remaining 6 months of the programme. Includes reflection about “who I intend to

			and reduced their involvement and interaction with the participants. The group was expected to lead the programme and their development during this time).	be in my travels”, who they are going to journey with, what actions they will take, etc. *Travel Logs (3) *Final development snapshot *Report to scholarship provider
Residential 5	2 – 3 December 2010	“Leadership as Community Building “	*“Communityship”	*Unpacking and constructing what community means for the group *Feedback about building community in their leadership going forward *Farewells and graduation

Appendix B. Required Readings on the Catalyst Programme

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Facilitator/Programme Participant

An Ethnographic Exploration of Leadership Development in Practice

My name is Helen Nicholson and I am a PhD student at the Department of Management and International Business at the University of Auckland.

I would like to invite you to participate in research I am conducting for my PhD thesis.

<i>What is the topic of this research?</i>	The research aims to investigate the nature of the leadership development journey, especially with regards to processes of identity construction.
<i>How will data be collected?</i>	<p>My research will involve observing your activities, behaviours, and interactions throughout the full duration of your leadership development programme. However, you may at any time decline to be part of the observation process.</p> <p>With your permission, I may also conduct an interview with you, focusing on your perception of the programme experience. This interview will take no more than 60 minutes. If interviewed, you may also decline to answer any of the questions in the interview.</p>
<i>Will my participation in this research affect my status on the programme?</i>	I have obtained consent from the Chief Executive Officer of The Atlas Institute. Your participation is voluntary and participation/non-participation will not impact your status in the programme in any way.
<i>Will this process be recorded in any manner?</i>	<p>With your consent, I would like to video-record certain interactions between participants and facilitators that occur during the programme. You may decline to be video-taped prior to the event and you may ask for the video-taping to be stopped at any time, without providing a reason. The video-recordings will not be made available to any third party.</p> <p>If I interview you, I will ask your permission to audio-record the interview. Again, you may decline to be audio-recorded, and you may ask for the audio-taping to be stopped at any time, without providing a reason.</p>
<i>How will the researcher ensure anonymity and confidentiality?</i>	<p>No material that could personally identify you will be used in any report on this study. The name of the organisation will not be identified in the reporting.</p> <p>You have the right to withdraw any information that you provide up until 31st December 2010.</p>

	<p>The audio tapes may be transcribed by the researcher to assist in the analysis and reporting. If a third party transcribes the interview they will be asked to sign a comprehensive confidentiality agreement to protect your privacy.</p> <p>There is some risk that facilitators may be identifiable in the reporting of the results (due to the small number of facilitators assigned to a programme). If deemed necessary, this may will be mitigated by disguising the participants by changing their gender in reporting and avoiding attributing any idiosyncratic comments to a participant that would be able to obviously link to the identity of the participant.</p>
<i>What will the data be used for?</i>	The interview and observation data will be used for the purpose of writing my thesis and any publications that arise from this research.
<i>How will the data be stored?</i>	The audio and video recordings will be stored for a period of up to six years for the purpose of developing the research for further publication. This information will be kept securely so that only myself and my supervisors will be able to access this data. After this period of time, the data will be destroyed.
<i>Am I able to receive a copy of my transcripts and/or the final report?</i>	If you wish, you will receive a summary report of the research project upon its completion. A copy of your video tape, audio tape and its transcript can be made available to you. Please specify on the attached consent form if you would like either of these records and documents provided to you.

I will also provide you with an interview consent form. I will ask you to read and sign this form before the research project begins. This consent form will be retained for a period of six years.

I would like to thank you for sharing your information and time for this research project. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor at any time. The contact details of myself, my supervisors and my Head of Department are provided on the following page.

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For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact:
Chair
The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee
The University of Auckland
Office of the Vice Chancellor
Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142.
Ph: 09 373-7599 extn. 87830.

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 09/04/2009 for 3 years, Reference Number 2009/050**

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Chief Executive Officer

An Ethnographic Exploration of Leadership Development in Practice

My name is Helen Nicholson and I am a PhD student at the Department of Management and International Business at the University of Auckland.

I would like to invite your organisation to participate in research I am conducting for my PhD thesis. The research aims to investigate the discourses, processes, and practices undertaken in leadership development programmes. In particular, this project pays attention to the interactions between programme participants and facilitators in order to further understand and question the relational and collective identities constructed in this context.

With your consent, I would like to approach you and the members of your Leadership Development Team as part of my research project. The employees' participation in the research is voluntary and will not affect their employment status. My research will involve observing the activities, behaviours, and interactions of programme participants and facilitators across 2 to 4 leadership development programmes for their full duration. Interviews may also be conducted with facilitators and programme participants. This interview will take no more than 60 minutes.

I would like to video-record certain interactions between participants and facilitators that occur during the programme. Participants may decline to be video-taped prior to the event and may ask for the video-taping to be stopped at any time, without providing a reason. The video-recordings will not be made available to any third party.

If I interview a participant, I will ask their permission to audio-record the interview. Again, participants may decline to be audio-recorded, and may ask for the audio-taping to be stopped at any time, without providing a reason. The audio tapes may be transcribed by the researcher to assist in the analysis and reporting. If a third party transcribes the interview they will be asked to sign a comprehensive confidentiality agreement to protect your privacy.

Interviews will be audio-recorded only with the consent of the interviewee. Interactions will only be video recorded with the consent of the interviewee. This recorded material will not be available to any third party except if the audio tapes are transcribed by an external operator. In this case, the third party will be asked to sign a comprehensive confidentiality agreement to protect the participant's privacy.

No material that could personally identify a participant will be used in any report on this study. The interview data will be used for the purpose of writing of my thesis and any publications that arise from this research.

All data collected will be stored for a period of up to six years for the purpose of developing the research for further publication. This information will be kept securely so that only myself and my supervisors will be able to access this data. After this period of time, the data will be destroyed. Participants have the right to withdraw any information provided up until 31st December 2010.

There is some risk that facilitators may be identifiable in the reporting of the results (due to the small number of facilitators assigned to a programme). If deemed necessary, this may be mitigated by disguising the participants by changing their gender in reporting and avoiding attributing any idiosyncratic comments to a participant that would be able to obviously link to the identity of the participant. The name of the organisation will not be identified in the reporting.

You will receive a summary report of the research project upon its completion. Upon request, the findings from this research project can also be presented to your organisation in a workshop format. Participants will be offered the option of receiving a copy of their audio tapes and transcripts.

I would like to thank you for sharing your information and time for this research project. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor at any time. The contact details of myself, my supervisors and my Head of Department are as follows:

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For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact:
Chair
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The University of Auckland
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**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 09/04/2009 for 3 years, Reference Number 2009/050**

CONSENT FORM

Facilitator/Participant

An Ethnographic Exploration of Leadership Development in Practice

This consent form will be held for a period of six years

Researcher: Helen Nicholson

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to take part in this research.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to 31st December 2010.
- I agree / do not agree to be audiotaped.
- I agree / do not agree to be videotaped.
- I wish / do not wish to have my tapes returned to me.
- I wish / do not wish to receive the summary of findings.
- I understand that a third party who has signed a confidentiality agreement will transcribe the audio tapes.
- I understand that data will be kept for 6 years, after which they will be destroyed.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer any specific questions and/or decline to be observed.

Signed: _____

Name (Please print clearly): _____

Date: _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 09/04/2009 for 3 years, Reference Number 2009/050

CONSENT FORM

Chief Executive Officer

An Ethnographic Exploration of Leadership Development in Practice

This consent form will be held for a period of six years

Researcher: Helen Nicholson

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree for my organisation to take part in this research.

- I understand the nature of the research and give my consent for the researcher to approach employees of my firm to be involved in the research.
- I agree that employees' participation in the research is voluntary and will not affect their employment status.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to 31st December 2010.
- I wish / do not wish to receive the summary of findings.
- I understand that data will be kept for 6 years, after which they will be destroyed.
- I agree to participate in this research and am aware that I may withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer any specific questions.

Signed: _____

Name (Please print clearly): _____

Date: _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 09/04/2009 for 3 years, Reference Number 2009/050

Appendix G. Summary of Discourses and Key Analytical Questions

Discourse	Illustrative Data	Key Questions
Open Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open myself up • open my mind • I loosened up a little 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amongst all this talk of opening up, should leadership development contain discussions about what aspects of identity an individual would like to protect, keep hidden, private, closed off, or fixed? • Being opened up can involve being emancipated from fixed and limited identities, but can it also raise concerns about what participants are being exposed to? • Is being stuck or fixed a state to be feared and escaped from or does it provide a necessary holding zone for development?
Floundering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we keep getting stuck and not knowing how to get ourselves out • going nowhere • no idea how to move things • waiting to be told 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are the participants unable to escape from floundering even when they have received help from the facilitators? • How can those involved in development deal with participant's calls for help whilst ensuring that they retain a sense of engagement and ownership in their development? • If inaction is a contributing factor to being trapped in a floundering state, how can participants move from talking about doing to actually doing in a programme structured around online dialogue? • If one of the reasons that floundering is collectively created is due to individuals not feeling challenged or shaken up enough, how can this be fostered?
Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try on a different identity • carry multiple identities • to change others, change who you are being • experiment being something else 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do constructionist forms of leadership development have a responsibility to question their encouragement of bringing non-work selves into their workplace – and the overly agentic view of identity work? • Do the facilitators enact this playful identity work discourse they promote to the participants? • Why do many of the participants seem silent when facilitators implicate who the “others need to be” in another individual's identity work? • Why do some participants struggle to enact their fluid identity work they appear to talk eloquently about? • What are the ethics of participants using this discourse to develop a kind of leadership identity work which seeks to gain control,

		power, and authority over others?
Shaken up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • turned upside down • all mixed up • dismantle • question each other and shake things up a bit • the settling and the chaos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can leadership development programmes create a form of shaking up that is sensitive to fragilities and not destructive – yet does not dilute the necessary agitation? How can it be a “beautiful thing”? • If we accept that participants can benefit from a form of shaking up, how can development deal with those participants who seem to deflect or ignore it? Are these people the most in need of some shaking? • How can programmes be designed to move participants between the shaking and its accompanying settling? • How might development negotiate the struggle some participants experience with becoming fragmented rather than remaining a whole?
Cut apart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • throwing someone a shock • fire away at me • blowing everything to smithereens • pulling you apart • push each other harder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do developers navigate the tension between those who invite being cut apart and those who react in “disgust” at it? • If participants do not want to be “nice and polite” but also do not want to experience confrontation, what kind of “pushing” do participants desire? • Is there an ethics of care (Gabriel, 2009) that goes with this undoing – both for those receiving it and those enacting it? • Why do participants position themselves as the receiver of other people’s cutting apart attempts, rather than taking a more active role? • Why do some facilitators feel uncomfortable being positioned as holding the “knife”? • How do those involved in development navigate the tension between participants asking to be “helped back on track” and others accusing such people of “re-forming them to your own liking”?
Let go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • giving up bits of self • who I am without that • I’ve got to let go of that engineer identity • I felt a large amount of loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amidst all this letting go, what will participants maintain or hold? • Is more challenging needed of this discourse considering participants are encouraging each other to let go of discouraged expert identities and instead adopt more ignorant behaviours? • What is the process of letting go? • While some participants talk about the loss experienced with letting go, others talk of what they gain through it, therefore is letting go all that distinct from construction and acquisition forms of identity work?

Slip back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slip back into the old identity • hard to sustain an identity • catching myself • reverting to your expert engineer self • falling back into the tried and trusted ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would it be more helpful if slipping back is reframed from a regression to a lesser state, to a meaning that recognises it as a part of the fluidity of identity work? • In doing so, might this avoid the destructive self-disciplining which some participants engage in when they slip back into old identities? • If slipping back is an anticipated movement in identity work, perhaps leadership development should focus not on how to avoid slipping back but instead on developing the “practices and relationships” to “catch oneself”?
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