THERE’S A LEADER IN YOU!: A CRITICAL MAPPING OF LEADERSHIP
DISCOURSE IN THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of NICOLE CAPRIEL FERRY find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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Leadership development is a prominent focus of U.S. higher education in the 21st century. Overwhelmingly, contemporary theories of leadership suggest that everyone can be a leader given enough training, and leadership research has largely concentrated on identifying the specific processes or behaviors of leaders to improve leadership development efforts. In contrast, this dissertation research proposes a critical examination of the ‘everyone-can-be-a-leader’ model as an ostensibly inclusive approach and looks at how such meritocratic narratives may legitimate and normalize systemic inequality and inequities. Considering a socio-political-economic and historical understanding of leadership—with special attention to the rise of the neoliberal moment—this dissertation uses several strategies of Critical Discourse Analysis to map leadership within the university. The methods used include: (a) analysis of personal narratives and participant observation; (b) critical historiography of popular leadership development texts and practices; and (c) thematic readings of documents, field notes, and archival materials. Drawing on queer, feminist, and poststructural scholarship, this qualitative dissertation highlights how commonsensical ideas of leadership, and the notion of ‘leader,’ are constrained by discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and ability. With findings that current
dominant leadership practices are advancing masculinist, white, and heteronormative theories of leadership, this dissertation suggests that contemporary practices of leadership may individualize, discriminate against, and exclude historically marginalized students, rather than politically mobilize all students toward the democratic, equitable, and socially just aims higher education seeks to cultivate.
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DEDICATION

For my little followers, Marx and Lennin.

(My dogs, not the people)
I sat down with the newly appointed president of a top-ten liberal-arts college. . . . I started by telling him that I had just visited an upper-level class, and that no one there had been able to give me a decent definition of “leadership,” even though the college trumpeted the term at every opportunity. He declined to offer one himself. Instead, he said, a bit belligerently, “I’ve been here five months, and no one has been able to give me a satisfactory definition of ‘the liberal arts.’”

. . . I tried to explain the difference between the fine and the liberal arts (the latter are “arts” only by an accident of derivation) with little success. “So what do you think the college should be about?” I finally asked him.

“Leadership,” he said.

- William Deresiewicz

There’s a leader in you! Or at least that’s what the leadership books, workshops, and gurus tell (sell?) us. A 14 billion dollar a year industry, the market for leadership development flourishes, as companies, institutions, and individuals invest in leadership development materials and trainings that promise to teach each and every person how to become a leader (Kellerman, 2012). The US university is no exception. In his 2001 inaugural speech as then-president of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers (2001) made clear a principle aim of US education when he stated: “In this new century, nothing will matter more than the education of future leaders” (para. 80).¹

Over the past 50 years, the imperative to develop leaders within the university has become a primary goal of the institution, supported at both the administrative and academic levels. In fact, developing students as leaders is not only a popular undertaking of the university, but is also understood as a responsibility of higher education. As Vivechkanand Chunoo and Laura Osteen (2016) insist: “the agreement between higher education and the society it serves is characterized by the commitment to produce knowledge, inspire societally sensitive values, and
provide the blueprint for the development of leaders and leadership capacity in individuals” (p. 11).

On campuses across the US, universities offer degrees in Leadership Studies, and because of the seemingly interdisciplinary nature of the subject, ‘leadership’ can be found in numerous departments and programs such as Educational Leadership, Organizational Leadership, Management Studies, Human Resources and Leadership Development, and Global Leadership (Gomez, 2007; Guthrie, Jones, Osteen, & Hu, 2013; Kellerman, 2012). Leadership development also appears outside of the classroom, as Student Affairs offices provide extracurricular opportunities in the form of leadership programs, trainings, and conferences, and by staffing leadership centers that contain a compendium of leadership books, manuals, and toolkits (Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, & Arensdorf, 2006). Some universities even offer customizable, multi-week leadership development institutes for students, administrators, and external corporate executives for costs of up to $150,000 per person (Gurdjian, Halbeisen, & Lane, 2014). Indeed, from appearing in university mission statements to presidential addresses, it seems that a “relentless attention to leadership . . . permeates higher education” (Kellerman, 2012, p. 155).

The massive appeal of leadership development within higher education makes sense given the transformations of both the university and of leadership. Higher education has seen substantial changes since the late 1970s and 80s, with many critical scholars noting the ways in which the epoch of neoliberalism has reshaped the practices and purposes of the institution to align with market values and logics (Bousquet, 2008; Darder, 2012; Harvey, 2005; Melamed, 2011; Peters, 2001; Suspitsyna, 2010). Sometimes thought of as “capitalism on steroids” (Brown, 2015a, para. 19), neoliberal economics advance open and unencumbered international
trade, advocate for minimal government involvement and increased privatization, and insist that market rationality is the best monitor for democracy and freedom (Besley & Peters, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Melamed, 2011). Under neoliberalism, “economic interpretations” have been applied to traditionally non-fiscal and socializing institutions, such as the university (Peters, 2001, p. 16). In a neoliberal context where ‘citizenship’ is measured by consumption, and democracy and fairness are rearticulated in terms of ‘getting your money’s worth,’ education becomes similarly understood as an investment that people shop for in the same way they do cars (Suspitsyna, 2010). Within the neoliberal university, students are often viewed as ‘customers,’ education is situated as a consumable good, and all facets of teaching and learning are assessed for ease of mass reproduction. The mapping of neoliberal ideologies onto the university has essentially restructured every sphere of university organization, from policies (Allan, Iverson, & Ropers-Huilman, 2010), to faculty positions (Bousquet, 2008; Ferguson, 2015), to funding decisions for departments (Darder, 2012; Duggan, 2003), and even the ways in which inclusion and diversity practices are enacted (Ferguson, 2012).

The spread of leadership development within the university is also telling of the shifts in the meaning of ‘leadership’ over the latter half of the 20th century. Rather than the Great Man theories (Carlyle, 1840) of leadership, popular in the late 19th century, which suggested leadership was a natural born trait of specifically ‘great men,’ leadership is now seen as a skill or process that any individual can develop given some guidance and training, provided, of course, one has the prerequisite motivation. Indeed, there is now a booming and profitable “leadership industry” comprised of “countless leadership centers, institutes, programs, seminars, workshops, experiences, trainers, books, blogs, articles, websites, webinars, videos, conferences, consultants, and coaches claiming to teach people—usually for money—how to lead” (Kellerman, 2012, p.
Constantly creating new leadership development initiatives, universities have come to rely on these materials and ‘expertise’ produced outside of the institution to prepare student leaders. Some leadership materials have even been created to specifically target college students, such as the books *Leadership for a Better World* (Komives & Wagner, 2009) and *The Student Leadership Challenge* (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Overwhelmingly, these leadership resources propose that *everyone* can be a leader with the right training and work ethic. To make such guarantees, the leadership industry has crafted and advanced a particular definition of leadership, which insists that the best way to nurture leadership potential is through *self*-development. The authors of the bestselling leadership text *The Leadership Challenge* illustrate this point:

> Leadership development is self-development, and self-development is not about stuffing in a whole bunch of new information or trying out the latest technique. It’s about leading out of what is already in your soul. It’s about liberating the leader within you. And it starts with taking a look inside. (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 337)

Drawing upon the fields of psychology and business management to support their claims and models of successful practices, the industry insists that through an investment in the self—*self*-development, self-awareness, self-discipline, self-reflection—people can develop leadership capabilities. As a result, leadership and the industry built upon it has become understood as not only a popular practice, but one of personal significance.

As such, ‘leaders’ are no longer only found in prominent roles within business or corporate contexts but across all spaces and all people, regardless of position. Crucial to this shift in meaning was the split between management and leadership during the late 1970s and early 80s. As the discourse of ‘management’ came to be perceived as outdated and exclusionary, ‘leadership’ was put forth by business schools and researchers as a practice distinct from, and superior to, ‘management’ (see Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 1990; Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991; Zaleznik, 1977). This split was imperative to its incorporation in the university (explored
in Chapter 4). More aligned with ostensible values of the democratic institution of education, ‘leadership’ did not seem to have the same ties to the ‘shop floor’ that management did and thus developed “universal appeal” (Northouse, 2007, p. 12). Framed as new, visionary, egalitarian, edgy, inspiring, and something that existed in all contexts beyond just the business arena, ‘leadership’ was imbued with beliefs that it had the ability to make real and transformational changes that management was not concerned with. Rebranded, being a ‘leader’ emerged as a desirable subject position for students within the university by purporting that which management could not: that self-development in the spirit of moral and ethical conscientiousness was at the heart of its practice.

Thus, the resounding opinion within higher education is that “leadership development is a legitimate undertaking—that people can and do learn how to lead” (Kellerman, 2012, p. 161). And as a ‘legitimate undertaking,’ leadership development has become an institutionally and socially supported practice (or set of practices) that hold sway in our contemporary understandings of education, work, success and identity. In this dissertation, There’s a Leader in You!: A Critical Mapping of Leadership Discourse in the American University, I examine leadership discourse and development practices in higher education, particularly as they emerge through student affairs offices. While traditional leadership research has focused on identifying the specific traits, behaviors, or models of leadership in the pursuit of improving leadership development efforts, this project draws on queer, feminist, and poststructural scholars, as well as Critical Leadership Studies, to disrupt the conventional conversation. Using critical discourse analysis, this project is motivated by questions which examine how leadership is recognized and understood in the university, why developing student leaders is seen as a valuable endeavor, and
how the neoliberal context, in particular, has shaped the practices and purposes of leadership development in the university.

In the sections that follow I introduce and summarize my project. I begin with an overview of how leadership has been traditionally studied and my alternative approach in this project. Next, I introduce my theoretical framework and describe how queer feminist poststructuralism serves as the lens through which I examine leadership as a discourse that shapes our relationships, subjectivity, and understandings of reality. Finally, I provide an outline of my methodology and methods for analysis in the proposed dissertation. I conclude by discussing the significance of the study and proposed contributions. At the end of the chapter, I also provide a small glossary with some key terms for the study as well as a summary of the chapters to follow.

**Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study**

The field of Leadership Studies has overwhelmingly focused on the ontological nature of leadership, relying on positivist approaches to ‘discover,’ ‘deduce,’ and ‘identify’ the universal or timeless traits and behaviors that constitute the best practices of ‘good’ leadership. As a result, leadership as a concept has been understood as an inherent part of an individual’s personality (Allport & Odbert, 1936; Carlyle, 1840), as behavioral (Likert, 1961), as contingent and situational (Fiedler, 1964), as a transformational exchange (Burns, 1978), or as an action that should be dedicated to serving others (Greenleaf, 2002). Consequently, contemporary leadership research “render[s] leadership as a predictable practice and leadership studies a prescriptive endeavor,” effectively depoliticizing leadership and disconnecting the concept from its historical setting (Collinson, 2011, p. 182).
Largely unexamined are questions pertaining to the historical entanglements which have produced contemporary practices and assumptions of leadership, as well as the current circumstances which constitute leadership as both thinkable and desirable today. In response, scholars within the emerging camp of Critical Leadership Studies (CLS) have attempted to address such omissions in what they call ‘mainstream’ leadership studies by treating leadership as a discursive, cultural production, rather than an identifiable relationship or a unique characteristic in some actor (e.g., Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Collinson 2011, 2012; Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Ford & Harding, 2011; Prasad, 2012). By approaching leadership with lenses different from those within mainstream (positivist) research, CLS has illuminated the socially constructed nature of leadership (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010), as well as the heteronormative (Harding, Lee, Ford, & Learmonth, 2011), patriarchal (Allan, Gordon, & Iverson, 2006), and individualistic (Hartog & Dickson, 2004) practices and logics leadership discourse reifies and reproduces. However, as a relatively new and burgeoning perspective there is a need for CLS “to develop more nuanced accounts of the diverse economic, social, political and cultural contexts in which leadership dynamics are typically located” (Collinson, 2011, p. 190). This includes the university setting, which CLS has generally overlooked. Hence, few studies, critical or otherwise, have situated leadership within the contemporary economic and social context of the neoliberal moment, nor have they closely examined leadership’s incorporation into the university as both an industry and a discourse—two areas this dissertation research targets specifically.

Another omission in mainstream leadership research that this dissertation attends to concerns the ideological function of leadership and its involvement in the production of subjectivity under the everyone-can-be-a-leader discourse. As leadership development becomes
analogous with self-development, it is necessary for critical educational researchers to examine how leadership models may constitute the ‘leader’ as a subject position for students. This is especially urgent if we consider how the everyone-can-be-a-leader rhetoric operates within the university that also targets historically marginalized groups for leadership development, such as women and/or people of color. As CLS has illustrated, mainstream ideas of leadership are constrained by the discourses and identity markers of race, gender, sex, sexuality, age, and ability. If not interrogated from a more critical lens, university initiatives may advance implicitly masculinist, white, or heteronormative theories of leadership that limit historically marginalized groups’ access to the economic and social forms of success leadership may enable, as it simultaneously eschews other non-white, non-western ways of thinking about leadership. So while the current push suggesting that anyone can be a leader is an ostensibly well-meaning theory, if not carefully analyzed, the false meritocratic narratives and exclusionary practices that undergird leadership development may disconnect leadership from any substantive forms of collectivity and social justice.

Skeptical of the resounding belief that leadership is a value-neutral, yet social and moral good, this dissertation looks to the historical and contemporary conditions of neoliberalism which make it possible for leadership discourse to become so prominent in the university, and to better understand what aims the overwhelming emphasis on developing students into leaders might serve. I also pay special attention to conflation of self-development and leadership development within the university, examining the role of leadership discourse in constituting subjectivity for students. The explicit goal of this dissertation, then, is to map leadership as a socially and historically constituted discourse—informe by and in relation with other discourses of modernity—and as an important ideological technology that normalizes and legitimates the
construction and maintenance of neoliberal relationships and subjectivity within the American university.

**Research Questions**

While traditional studies on leadership ask what makes an effective leader, or what the best practices of leadership may be, this investigation instead posed the following questions:

a) How is leadership conceptualized and understood in the university?

b) What purposes do leadership development programs and practices serve in higher education?

c) What are the dominant discourses that shape, reflect, and produce understandings and experiences of leadership discourse and leadership development in the university?

d) How has the neoliberal context shaped the particular practices and purposes of leadership development in the university?

Guiding the research, these questions allowed me to better recognize and understand the complex relationship between leadership and the university; to see when institutionalized and uttered with authority, what the university highlights about leadership and what leadership highlights about the university. Such questions also allowed me to critically contextualize this relationship by situating leadership in relation to neoliberal discourse and to trace the ways in which leadership discourse has been shaped by such logic(s). Thus, my research does not ask what traits or behavioral techniques are under-researched within Leadership Studies, but rather, what purpose does valuing particular traits over others during specific times or contexts serve? Questions like these acknowledge the discursive production of leadership theories, which if interrogated more thoroughly, can provide insight into the maintenance of power amongst particular groups, as well as the ways in which individuals participate in their own subjection through leadership discourse and development.
Theoretical Framework: Queer Feminist Poststructuralism

In this project, I propose that the key to understanding the imperative to develop students into leaders is to treat leadership less as an identifiable object and more as a socially-, historically-, and culturally-constituted discourse. Understanding ‘discourse’ as “a dynamic constellation of words and images that legitimate and produce a given reality” (Allan, 2003, p. 47), and conceptualizing leadership as a discourse illuminates the role it plays in not only organizing our social institutions and relationships, but also in constituting our senses of self or subjectivity. Thus, under the broader umbrella of CLS, I combine the theoretical strands of queer theory, feminist theory, and poststructuralism to examine leadership discourse within the university—from now on referred to as queer feminist poststructuralism or QFP. QFP is useful for analyzing leadership as a discourse because, while poststructuralism looks at the “relation between language, subjectivity, social organization, and power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 12), queer and feminist theory politically mobilize poststructural work through an attentiveness to the material conditions and intersections of ‘identity,’ ‘diversity,’ and ‘empowerment’ in neoliberal times. QFP brings attention to not only how power relationships produce limits to our common conceptions of leadership, but specifically how the ‘leader’ subject position is constrained by other discourses such as race, gender, sex, sexuality, age, ability, and so on. In this way, QFP highlights ways in which contemporary practices and assumptions of leadership are tethered to masculinist, white, and/or heteronormative practices, despite the current overwhelming proposal that now everyone can be a leader. When leadership development is central within universities that also propagate diversity discourses, all of which is seen as ‘good business,’ these lines of inquiry become imperative to better understanding the function of leadership discourse in higher education. However, QFP also offers potential “world-making projects” (Rodríguez, 2014, p.
illuminating the constitutive or ideological transgressions necessary to reshape leadership discourse and its impact on students or the state of higher education broadly.

**Summary of Methodology**

To study leadership discourse and development in the university, I amassed what I call an *archive of leadership*. While archives are traditionally thought of as mere repositories where important documents are stored and catalogued, this dissertation draws on queer scholarship that has broadened the definition of what counts as an ‘archive’ (e.g., Berlant, 1997; Cvetkovich, 2003; Ferguson, 2012; Foucault, 1972; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 1996; Rodríguez, 2014). For example, in studying the transgender body, Halberstam (2005) drew on queer subculture and art to construct a new archive and thus reconfigure queer histories. Halberstam (2005) states: “The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity” (p. 169). Similarly, feminist and queer scholars have expanded notions of ‘the archive’ to create archives of feelings (Cvetkovich, 2003), gestures (Rodríguez, 2014), and the ephemeral (Muñoz, 1996).

Roderick Ferguson (2012), brings attention to the active role universities play in creating or serving as archives. He states that if archives are “the places to put [important] documents and the regimes that would discipline them” (p. 19), then the US university is “the capitol of archival power, training state and economy in its methods of representation and regulation” (Ferguson, 2012, p. 27). Considering universities as archives then, it is important to pay attention to the statements of these institutions, including what is said in an official capacity, as well as how they institutionalize discourses, making certain actions or understandings appear normal and commonplace (Ahmed, 2012). In relation to leadership, this project recognizes the university as an institution that not only speaks with authority about leadership and how to
develop it, but also a place where leadership becomes an institutionalized part—seen as inherent and natural—of higher education. Thus, this dissertation treats the university (but also the people and materials within it), as an archive itself and as a discursive plane upon which particular conceptions of leadership circulate.

I began data collection for this project while working in higher education as the Leadership Coordinator in a Student Affairs office dedicated to increasing student involvement on campus. The university itself is a Research I (Doctoral University-Highest Research Activity) land grant university in a rural community of the Pacific Northwest—assigned the pseudonym Freedom University in the study to represent the absurdity of similar rhetoric often used in the present moment, despite the reality of hyper-control and increased surveillance that neoliberalism requires. From 2011-2014, in this role I planned several leadership conferences for over 400 students, brought leadership speakers to campus, and helped to coordinate an annual leadership awards banquet which recognized students and faculty on campus who demonstrated leadership in their communities and university activities. While in this position I also completed the university’s Leadership Facilitator Certification Program and led several small-group leadership training sessions for student organizations on campus. As the Leadership Coordinator, I learned the popular practices and models used at the university-level, as well as how to facilitate those for students, faculty, and administration, alike.

To collect data, I adopted a feminist methodological approach called an “ethnography of texts,” where researchers ‘follow’ concepts and discourses through institutions in search of their impact, and at times, their contradictions or unfulfilled promises (Ahmed, 2012, p. 12). This methodology is adapted from the work of Sara Ahmed (2012) in her book On Being Included, where Ahmed examines the institutionalization of diversity discourses in higher education. She
describes an ethnography of texts, stating, “To ask what diversity does, we need to follow diversity around, which is to say, we need to follow the documents which give diversity a physical and institutional form” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 12). Hence, to read the university as its own archive requires that we approach it as a constantly moving force, and one that we as researchers must move with if we want to better map its various and simultaneous effects. Borrowing Ahmed’s approach in this study then, I attempted to ‘follow leadership around’ the university— to see where it went or where it was not permitted to go, and to see who reserved the authority to be called a leader or to deem others as leaders. By ‘following’ leadership around and treating the university as both a text and a collection of texts, I formed an archive comprised of both textual and experiential data to examine leadership discourse in the university, including materials from popular press books to university created pamphlets, facilitation guides, and conference agendas.

Drawing from the approaches of queer theory, feminist theory, and poststructuralism— each of which has its own methods and modes of inquiry—necessitates what Judith ‘Jack’ Halberstam (1998) refers to as a “scavenger methodology” (p. 12). A scavenger methodology “refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” and uses multiple methods, particularly ones “often cast as being at odds with each other,” within a single examination (Halberstam, 1998, p. 12). In order to disentangle the archive of leadership discourse in the neoliberal university, I used several qualitative strategies of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), including: (a) description and interpretation of personal narratives and participant observation; (b) critical historiography of texts and contemporary practices; and (c) close and thematic readings of texts and archival materials. A poststructural CDA holds that discourses are “socially constitutive as well as socially shaped” (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2011, p. 358, original emphasis). Thus, CDA is attentive to the ways in which history, context, language,
power, ideology, and subjectivity come together to not only reflect but also produce discourses. It looks at each of these constitutive elements and attempts to disentangle their discursive formations and illuminate the particular realities or power relationships they express. In the following sections I briefly outline my CDA methods.

**Personal Narrative and Observations**

As a researcher, I took an active and prominent role throughout this qualitative investigation, warranting that personal narrative and observation be detailed as its own category for analysis. Having been so involved in leadership development initiatives at the university-level, a substantial part of my method consisted of reflecting upon and re-telling some of my experiences as the Leadership Coordinator at Freedom University. Feminist scholars (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1986; Fine, 1994; Richardson, 2000) have made clear how crucial drawing on these personal accounts can be to provide more nuanced examinations of power, privilege, and difference, and to illuminate the role of the researcher in acquiring, interpreting, and producing research. Involving my own narratives and observations throughout the research acknowledges that my positionality as a researcher—a white, able-bodied, bisexual, middle-class, cisgender woman—will always shape the study and analysis. This mode of analysis is also apt for working through leadership discourse since with the current focus on self-development, leadership becomes an “affective language that describes life under capitalism” (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 19)—deploying technologies which actively shape and constitute our relationships with ourselves and others. I present my experience in this dissertation not as indisputable fact, but as another window through which to peer into the daily practices and affective modes of leadership.
Critical Historiography

Critical historiography, as applied here, is closely aligned with Michel Foucault’s (1984) genealogical method. Critical historiography challenges ahistoricity, showing how discourses have been understood differently across time and contexts. Thus, critical historical tracings challenge the way we look at and recount history, and illustrate the ways in which common sense assumptions or things deemed a ‘normal’ part of society are actually produced over time and intertwined with power/knowledge relationships. Specifically, this dissertation looked at the historical and contemporary neoliberal transformations from the late 1970s to the present in the US that have played a role in shaping the contemporary leadership discourses and practices we see in the university today. Furthermore, historical contextualization was used to analyze not only how leadership became a part of the university and Student Affairs offices, but also how some contemporary practices over others came to be the popular given the neoliberal context. The purpose of this mode of analysis is not to find origins; not to illustrate the present by locating its roots in the past, but to challenge the present assumption that leadership is naturally occurring, ahistorical, and an unequivocally social and moral good. I did not seek to provide an answer to the question: How can I become the best leader? But to incite a pause that makes one question: When (and how) did becoming a ‘good leader’ become so important to me? To do so, this dissertation looked at specific past events and historical epochs, that although may seem unrelated, have played a role in shaping the contemporary leadership discourses and practices we see in the university today. Thus, this mode of analysis illuminates leadership not as this autonomous, objectively studied, naturally occurring feature of our social structures and relationships, but a discourse shaped by the historical context and relations of power.
Close Reading and Thematic Analysis

Finally, as a third method, I conducted close, deconstructive, and thematic readings of archival materials. Recognizing that discourses as constituted by historical, cultural, and social processes, CDA draws careful connections between the historical development of discourses and contemporary texts and practices. A CDA also sees texts as both reflective and productive of discourses and power relations within the specific context from which they were created and in which they circulate. At times, this mode of analysis involved more textually-oriented readings to be performed, where I looked for common themes within texts—giving special attention to recurring topics, word usage, metaphors, and logics used. At other times, it involved examining these texts in connection to other texts (intertextuality) and to situate them in relation to broader political, cultural, and social agendas or discourses (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2011). This was accomplished by examining not only the denotative but also connotative meaning of texts; that is, the underlying, affective, ideological, or suggestive elements of the language used (Hall, 2007). Analyzing connotative meanings allowed me to thematically trace leadership discourse, finding recurring or common patterns across texts.

Significance of the Study

Grounded in the belief that leadership is a skill that can be learned, leadership development has become a prominent focus of higher education in the 21st century. Given the ubiquity of leadership initiatives on university campuses across not only North America but around the world, it is important to evaluate the very concept of leadership as well as the various programs which seek to develop students as leaders. However, with the majority of traditional leadership research focusing on identifying the specific traits and behaviors of leadership, the historical ties and power relationships which have produced contemporary understandings of
leadership and the increasing propagation of leadership development programs within university, are largely left unexamined. Alternatively, this queer feminist poststructural critique analyzes the increasing presence and complexities of leadership development in the university in an effort to not only deconstruct problematic assumptions, but to advance more ethical, sustainable, and socially just leadership practices in higher education.

The conclusions drawn in this dissertation is of value to students, administrators, and Student Affairs professionals alike. The experiences and materials within the university I discuss do not just chronicle the current state of leadership practices but also illustrate how leadership in the university is defined, how it shapes identities and subjects, and how it is symptomatic and reflective of other dominant ideologies. With an overarching goal to deepen understandings of leadership as a discourse, this project traces the incorporation and purposes of leadership within the university in order to illuminate the many taken-for-granted assumptions of leadership. Ultimately, the logics of neoliberalism, such as individualism, risk, responsibility, and meritocracy, may bolster leadership discourses that diminish more social justice-oriented opportunities for community building and collaborative leadership practices. Those ineligible for or left out of prevailing leadership discourse often lose the access, respect, or opportunities of leadership which enable social or economic success. Thus, my research is deeply invested in addressing the discourses of leadership development for historically marginalized communities who have traditionally been excluded from leadership opportunities. The broader significance of this kind of examination is especially salient given the overwhelming trend in leadership theory to suggest anyone can be a leader given guidance and training. While an ostensibly inclusive approach, such meritocratic narratives legitimate and normalize gendered, racial, and other forms of inequity if not critically examined. Although contemporary theories of leadership suggest that
everyone can be a leader given enough training and self-development, this dissertation examines how such a seemingly inclusive approach, as one that may bolster neoliberal meritocratic narratives that legitimate and normalize systemic inequality and inequities.

So while there may a leader in you, or in us all, I argue in this dissertation that the contemporary hegemonic visions of leadership employed within the university have the potential to engender individuated subjectivities, rather than the more democratic, equitable, or socially just forms of leadership that higher education seeks to nurture. However, by recognizing that subjection is tethered to malleable and socially constructed discourses, transgressive possibilities and radical resignifications also become possible. In order to make leadership more equitable and inclusive, the self-making practices that constitute it must be reconceptualized, shifting practices from those that cultivate individual entrepreneurs to those that recognize leadership as a constituent element of practices of solidarity and collaboration.

**Terminology and a Few Clarifications**

For reader ease and clarity, several commonly used terms in this study are defined below. This is especially important when the definitions of leadership remain so fuzzy (every action or non-action seems to be read as leadership) and often the term is used interchangeably with ‘management’ (which we will see later actually might make good sense).

- **Leadership Development.** Leadership development refers to the process or action of *becoming* a leader. Leadership development is often comprised of guidelines or advice which directs individuals to adopt certain dispositions, perspectives, or behaviors in order to develop as leaders. This term spotlights the practical implementation of leadership theories that often manifest as trainings, workshops, books, and institutes. It relies on the assumption that leadership can be learned and taught.
• **Leadership Studies.** Leadership Studies encompasses the “interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary field of leadership scholarship,” both inside and outside of the academy, which takes ‘leadership’—its processes, traits, and development practices—as its object for investigation (Kellerman, 2012, p. 159). Historically, Leadership Studies has been dominated by positivist epistemologies, which treat leadership as a measurable reality, and Leadership Studies as an objective science. Quantitative methodologies, especially surveys, are typically employed within the field (Bryman, 2011).

• **Mainstream Leadership Studies.** A term often used by Critical Leadership Studies scholars to describe the general field of Leadership Studies and point to its positivistic, empiricist, and quantitative orientations. While not always used as pejorative, ‘mainstream’ is not usually deployed as a term of endearment either. Mainstream leadership studies often focus on leadership as an identifiable, ahistorical object that can be objectively studied by scientists. The term ‘mainstream leadership’ (without the ‘studies’) is also sometimes used to describe the leadership industry which makes leadership a marketable fashion, a replicable process with steps and toolkits, or a teachable good for sale.

**Summary of Chapters**

The following dissertation includes a total of seven chapters. Though this dissertation contains the chapters that comprise a typical dissertation—introduction, theoretical framework, methods, discussion—rather than a singular ‘results’ or ‘analysis’ chapter, the dominant emerging themes found in this study are organized into three distinct, yet interrelated chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6). Since leadership is a large topic to address with many potential entry points for analysis, these chapters served as three foci where an analysis of leadership could be conducted at a deeper, more nuanced level. While this chapter served as an overall introduction
to, and summary of, my project, Chapter 2 outlines my theoretical framework (queer feminist poststructuralism) in more depth. Chapter 3 overviews my methodological approach to the study, describing how I employed several strategies of critical discourse analysis including personal narrative, thematic analysis, and critical historiography as methods to examine the ways in which language, past and present contexts, and power relationships shape prevailing understandings of leadership in the university today. In the first analysis chapter, Chapter 4, I map how the ‘everyone can be a leader’ model emerged alongside the neoliberal restructuring of higher education. Critically contextualized by Chapter 4, Chapters 5 and 6 take a deeper look at the implications and lived realities which are enabled and constrained by the everyone-can-be-a-leader discourse. Over the past 50 years, the leadership industry has created a definition of leadership which insists that the best way to cultivate leadership potential is through self-development. In Chapter 5, I explore this focus on self-development and look at how it individualizes leadership, creates the self as another space of ‘work,’ and conflates self-development with coerced confession. Chapter 6 explores the relationships and tensions between ‘women’s’ leadership development and ‘unisex’ leadership development discourses in higher education. Although positioned as empowering and inclusive, I discuss how ‘women’s’ leadership development, in tension with supposedly ‘unisex’ leadership development, constitutes womanhood as the problem itself that must be fixed in order for leadership capabilities to be developed. Finally, Chapter 7, serves as a closing epilogue to the project. Rather than providing solutions to the problems described in the project, the epilogue serves to open more questions, drift into some random areas for contemplation, and personalize this leadership story.
Leadership has been a topic of interest since around 400 B.C., with Plato’s *The Republic*, Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*, and Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince* cited as some of the earliest ‘leadership’ texts. However, the roots of modern academic or scholarly interest on leadership are usually associated with Thomas Carlyle and his Great Man theories in the late 19th century, outlined in his book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1840). Over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, research on leadership has proliferated across disciplines, resulting in numerous conferences, books, programs, and journals dedicated to the subject. Overwhelmingly, traditional Western or ‘mainstream’ leadership research has focused on identifying, discovering, or deducing the specific traits, behaviors, or models of leadership—often in the pursuit of improving leadership development efforts. Accordingly, studies on leadership differ in their definitions and understandings as to what leadership is or how it works. While some scholars argue leadership is context-based or situational (Fiedler, 1964), others have identified leadership as a process (Northouse, 2007), a transformational practice (Burns, 1978), or particular character traits within certain individuals (Allport & Odbert, 1936; Carlyle, 1840). In the university, leadership educators claim to have discovered the various stages of leadership that students’ progress through when developing their leader persona, such as the Leadership Identity Development model (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). Although these differing understandings of leadership speak to the connections between leadership discourse and the political and historical context, mainstream leadership scholars often maintain that leadership is a timeless, natural, or identifiable phenomenon that can be
recorded and studied objectively given the appropriate method. Such pragmatic considerations by mainstream leadership researchers have situated leadership as ostensibly apolitical, ahistorical, and atheoretical.

As a result, very few mainstream leadership scholars have asked critical questions of leadership that look to investigate the power relationships imbued within the concept, the fallacies of leadership as normal and natural, or the underlying assumptions of the field of Leadership Studies, itself. In response, a relatively new and burgeoning perspective called Critical Leadership Studies (CLS) (see Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Collinson 2011, 2012; Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Ford & Harding, 2012; Prasad, 2012) has “emerge[d] directly from that which is unexplored or missing in the mainstream orthodoxy” (Collinson, 2011, p. 181). CLS critiques mainstream leadership research for frequently romanticizing the concept, ignoring ‘bad’ leadership, and dismissing problematic power relationships such as the leader/follower binary upon which Leadership Studies is rationalized (Collinson, 2011). Hence, rather than an essential, natural element or a unique, identifiable characteristic in an actor, CLS understands leadership as a socially constructed (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010), discursive, cultural production (Collinson, 2011).

While CLS research can be counted on to provide critical interpretations of leadership, CLS is best conceptualized as a cluster of “broad, diverse and heterogeneous perspectives” (Collinson, 2011, p. 181). CLS scholars draw upon a wide-range of theoretical frameworks, such as critical race theory (Nkomo & Ariss, 2013) or psychoanalytic theory (Ford & Harding, 2011), to analyze leadership in ways that mainstream leadership research does not. Joining the CLS conversation, in this project I combine the theoretical strands of queer theory, feminist theory, and poststructuralism to examine leadership discourse within the university—from now
On referred to as queer feminist poststructuralism or QFP. Within this project, poststructural theorists such as Michel Foucault, Tina Besley, Michael Peters, Nikolas Rose, and Elizabeth Allan, provide a foundation for understanding discourse, ideology, power/knowledge relationships, and subjectivity. With a poststructuralist lens, I can read leadership as an institutionally and socially supported discourse (or formation of discourses) and thus imbued with the power to shape our relationships, sense of self, and the ways in which we navigate the university. Queer and feminist theory, specifically the theories of Sara Ahmed, Micki McGee, Wendy Brown, Roderick Ferguson, and Jodi Melamed, extend and advance poststructural concepts by bringing attention to the ways in which power and inequity are rooted in forms of difference like race, gender, sex, sexuality, and ability. For example, queer and feminist perspectives on leadership development have shown many of the common models and traits of leadership to express masculinist (Allan, Gordon, & Iverson, 2006; Billing & Alvesson, 2000), white supremacist (Liu & Baker, 2016), or heteronormative (Rumens, 2016) norms and values.

In the sections that follow, I illustrate how I use QFP to frame my analysis of leadership in the university. Since queer feminist poststructuralism serves as the foundation for my theoretical framework, it is important I provide a brief history and epistemological orientation of the frames, their similarities and differences, before describing some of the central tenets used in this project. I then provide my definitions of discourse, power/knowledge, ideology, and subjectivity. Throughout these descriptions I connect the concepts back to leadership and my current project as a way to frame the chapters that follow. The purpose of this chapter is to deepen the idea of discourse and its relation to the notion of leadership, providing a framework for analysis. It is the hope that this framework will offer not only a new understanding of how discourse operates, but also a new critical theory of leadership.
Queer Feminist Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is difficult to define as it lacks, quite fittingly, the cohesiveness or clarity attributed to most postpositivist or modernist perspectives. There are many intellectual figures associated with poststructuralism, including Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva, and poststructural theories have been applied across disciplines, from anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss), history (Hayden White, Mark Poster), and geography (David Harvey), to feminist and gender studies (Judith Butler, Chris Weedon), policy studies (Elizabeth Allan, Carol Bacchi, Judith Baxter), and postcolonial studies (Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha). Accordingly, the term is heavily contested and there are vast, even competing, interpretations amongst scholars. Thus, poststructuralism is best understood as a “movement of thought—a complex skein of thought embodying different forms of critical practice” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 18, original emphasis).

While poststructuralism incorporates many of the foundational assumptions of structuralism, often associated with works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss, it also contests and extends the structuralist project—constituting the post-ing of structuralism. In his lectures on general linguistics from 1907-1911 (which eventually became the book, Course in General Linguistics), Saussure put forth a ‘scientific’ approach to the structure of language with his theory of the sign, signifier, and signified. The sign (or the word used to represent something) is made up of the signifier and signified. The signifier is the sound or image of the sign/word, and the signified is the meaning or concept. For example, ‘a cat’ (the sign) is the combination of the sound/letters of ‘C-A-T’ (signifier) plus the concept of the thing or the idea in our minds when you think of a cat (the signified). With this theory, Saussure countered previous
assumptions that language merely reflects reality—that there is some natural or predetermined reason that we call a cat, ‘cat’—and instead proposed “meaning is produced within language” (Weedon, 1997, p. 23). He states, “language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic difference that have issued from the system” (Saussure, 1959, p. 121). Others, such as linguist Valentin Voloshinov, extended Saussure’s system of signs, and connected language to production of consciousness and ideology.

Like structuralists, poststructuralists understand meaning as produced through language, rather than merely reflective of it. However, poststructuralists also see language and meaning as both reflective and symptomatic of history, culture, and context and give attention to the ways in which language, as a socio-historical production, can be imbued with multiple meanings and interpretations at any given time (i.e., competing discourses). Also, unlike structuralism, poststructuralism does not recognize a sharp distinction between sign and signifier. Rather there are only signifiers, whose meaning(s) are always shifting, ever-changing, and slipping. Jacques Derrida (1978) was central in this reconceptualization, arguing that the signified is constantly deferred. Focusing on writing and textuality, he “replaces the fixed signified of Saussure’s chains of signs with a concept of différence in which meaning is produced via the dual strategies of difference and deferral” (Weedon, 1997, p. 25). For Derrida, meaning is constructed through difference and therefore never stable, as signs and signifiers continually shift because of their relationship with other signs and signifiers for said meaning. Moreover, while structuralists tried to frame their study of language as a science (i.e. semiology), poststructuralists are adamantly opposed to the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and objectivity, and are therefore critical of the ‘scientific’ approach that structuralists imposed when examining language. Instead, from a position of argument rather than objectivity, poststructuralism looks to language as a way to
examine issues of power, subjectivity, and social relationships (Peters & Burbules, 2004). In this way, poststructuralism can be a considered a *philosophical* response to the scientific empiricism of structuralism (Peters, 2001).

The two camps also differ in their conceptions of subjectivity and agency (to be explored more later). It is here that the philosophical edge of poststructuralism is also made clear. While both operate from an anti-essentialist perspective and see the concept of the autonomous, rational individual as problematic—suggesting instead that language as a system shapes the way individuals see the world and themselves—structuralists tend to see individuals as “simply bearers of structures” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 21). Saussure viewed thought and language as coterminous—that thought was merely a by-product of language—while Lévi-Strauss sought to find some universal structure by which all individuals operated. Poststructuralists, on the other hand, see the interplay and tensions that shape thinking and subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). As such, they reframe structuralist notions of subjectivity that find individuals as continually acted upon by structures, and propose that subjects are both *constituted by* and *constituting of* their own subjectivity—though always in relation the context and power relationships within which they exist.

As a ‘movement’ or ‘philosophical response’ then, it is important to make clear the specific assumptions suitable for this investigation of leadership as not all theories or forms of poststructuralism are applied in this analysis. In this project, I use *queer feminist* poststructuralism (QFP) to analyze leadership development practices in higher education. Importantly, queer feminist poststructuralism speaks more to whom I enter into conversation and the features of poststructural thought I tend to highlight than it does the particular bodies or identities I target in my research. In the sections that follow I briefly
describe feminist theory and queer theory in relation to one another and to poststructuralism. In later sections, I include feminist and queer interpretations of the poststructural concepts of discourse, power, ideology, and subjectivity. It should be noted though, that the key contributions of queer and feminist theories I describe are my own interpretations of varying and distinct scholarship. I do not want to suggest that my explanation of QFP theories is the only way to define these theoretical strands or imply that they can be easily delineated into neat categories—this is especially important to clarify with frameworks like these that resist homogenizing practices of power and disciplinary coherence in general. No one theory of normality, politics, identity, or even gender and sexuality can be traced throughout all these diverse frameworks and subsequent scholarship. Instead, what is highlighted are some of the uses of queer and feminist theory suited to my project.

**Feminist Poststructuralism**

Feminist theory encompasses a broad range of epistemologies and perspectives on gender, sex, subjectivity, the body, dominance, difference, patriarchy, equality and/or inequity. The attention to different issues and the various approaches to analyze or address feminist concerns has engendered numerous branches of feminist theorizing and feminisms, including, but not limited to: liberal feminism, ecofeminism, womanism, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, postmodern feminism, transfeminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, and poststructural feminism. Although each perspective contributes something important to the conversation on gender, ‘women,’ inequality, or domination, it is the last theory, poststructural feminism (which I refer to as feminist poststructuralism), that is centered in this project.

In the 1970s and 80s, alternative feminist notions of difference and intersectionality, which have been termed multiracial feminism (Thompson, 2002) complicated liberal feminist
theory and US equality politics, as well as New Left Politics generally. The expectation that there was some shared experience by all who identified as ‘woman’ was put under pressure by feminist theorists who argued that race, class, sexuality or other aspects of identity complicated any homogenous, universal category or representational politics. While many approaches emerged to account for such differences, most with the recognition that gender is socially constructed, feminist poststructuralists looked to language, discourse, and the subject to make sense of the ‘woman’ category, equality and emancipation practices, and the notion of the individual, subject, or identity (Allan, 2010). Moving away from the Cartesian-Kantian humanist subject, feminist poststructural theorists argue that women, the category itself, and the subjects who adopt its label are constituted through discourse. That is, there is no doer before the deed, but rather gender is a performative act (Butler, 1990). As such, a feminist poststructural interpretation of the subject directly challenges essentialism and liberal feminist politics, which rely on ‘women’ as a political strategy for addressing inequality. Looking to the language itself, poststructural feminists asked: If women are defined in opposition to men, and men are always seen as absolute while women are ‘the other’ (de Beauvoir, 1953), then can the ‘woman’ category ever provide emancipation when it “is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (Butler, 1990, p. 2)?

However, feminist theorists’ relationship with poststructural theory has not gone without critique. Poststructuralism has been criticized by feminist scholars as a field largely dominated by male theorists and thus inattentive to the concerns of women or gender normativity, including their participation in the workforce and issues of sexual violence (e.g., Alcoff, 1990). However, speaking on specifically Foucault’s work, Chris Weedon (1997) argues for the usefulness of poststructural theory in combination with feminist concerns:
If Foucault’s theory of discourse and power can produce in feminist hands an analysis of patriarchal power relations which enables the development of active strategies for change, then it is of little importance whether his own historical analyses fall short of this. (p. 13)

So, while Foucault acknowledged that “[t]o say that ‘everything is political’ . . . is to set oneself the barely sketched task of unraveling this indefinite tangled skein” (as cited in Mills, 1997, p. 80), feminist poststructuralism takes up the task of ‘unraveling’ said skein to make clear not only the political effects of power but also the political potential of theorizing discourse specifically in relation to gender. Feminist poststructuralism then, “provide[s] an analytic framework that highlights the power of discourse yet also sustains an awareness of how gender and other forms of identity differences shape our daily lives and serve as mechanisms for social stratifications” (Allan, 2010, p. 21). The works of feminists such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and more recently, Chris Weedon, Elizabeth Allan, Patti Lather, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Judith Butler have been crucial in advancing poststructuralism and contributing to the development of feminist poststructural thought. Speaking to how she uses the poststructural, French philosophers in her work, Judith Butler (2006) explains that she seeks “not to ‘apply’ poststructuralism to feminism, but to subject those theories to a specifically feminist reformulation” (p. ix).

**Queer Theory**

Drawing on both poststructural and feminist perspectives, queer theory further maps the relations of power, difference, and subjectivity by reconfiguring systems of normalization, identity politics, and utopian projects. In fact, noting the overlaps, William Turner (2000) states that “poststructuralism is queer” (p. 22). The connection between queer theory and feminist theory, however, has been a bit more contentious. Indeed, while some argue that queer theory was a needed response to the heterosexism laden within liberal feminist theorizing (Huffer,
2013), others saw the rise of queer theory as a distinct line of inquiry in the 1990s as re-centering the white male experience at the same time that it obscured the anti-foundational feminist work that had occurred before, in the writings of Irigaray or Anzaldúa, for example (Huffer, 2013). However, while there is a perceivable—even sometimes useful—divide between feminist and queer theory, it can also be argued that their ‘split’ is in some ways a hyperbolized tactic of modernity that seeks to emphasize their differences with the purpose of creating rifts amongst scholarly communities who may actually have a stake in making transformational changes should they come together (Butler, 1994).

In fact, as an “historical offshoot of feminism” (Schoene, 2006, p. 292), it was the work of several women and feminist scholars who gave queer theorizing a foundation and even coined the term. During the late 1980s and early 90s, several feminist scholars including, Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Monique Wittig, Gayle Rubin, and Adrienne Rich, began to illuminate the limitations surrounding the current theorizing of sexuality within Women’s Studies and Gay and Lesbian Studies. They were especially critical of research at the time that stripped sexuality of power and politics and conceptualized it as an individual identity marker or merely a private act rather than a publicly and socially produced means of categorization and regulation. For instance, in Epistemology of the Closet—considered a founding text of queer theory—Sedgwick (1990) examined how the homosexual/heterosexual binary is used to structure other common sense binaries, such as speech/silence and knowledge/ignorance, which we use to make sense of our daily lives. She is often quoted stating: “an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 1). Conceptualizing sexuality from this anti-
foundational frame, queer theory builds on the work of feminists who theorized heterosexuality as an institution and saw queerness not only as a constituted subjectivity, but also as a disciplining societal force that regulates and conditions sites of normalcy and legibility.

In this way, sexuality cannot be thought of as solely an individual’s sexual desires, orientation, or private personal preferences, but must instead be considered as larger disciplinary and discursive formations of power which structure our thinking, perceptions, relationships, and the way we comprehend difference. For instance, central to the work of many queer theorists is the analysis of ‘heteronormativity,’ which refers to “the extent to which everyone, straight or queer, will be judged, measured, probed, and evaluated from the perspective of the heterosexual norm” (Chambers, 2003, p. 26). Heteronormativity situates heterosexuality as primordial, as sexuality par excellence, at the same time that it detaches (hetero)sexuality from traditional boundaries of sex and sexual attraction to highlight how social institutions, practices, policies, and language become mediums through which heteronormative practices and ideology operate, and accordingly come to appear as common sense, natural, and value-neutral. Consequently, our interactions, policies, affect, and other various discourses are produced within and also reify heterosexual expectations of life and living. Hence, like feminist poststructuralism and poststructuralist theory, queer theory looks to interrogate the ways in which identity, difference, and normality are discursively produced and involved in determining subjects’ legibility and social value.⁵

**Queer Feminist Poststructuralism**

QFP is useful for analyzing leadership as a discourse because, while poststructuralism looks at the “relation between language, subjectivity, social organization, and power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 12), queer and feminist theory politically mobilize poststructural work through an
attentiveness to the material conditions and intersections of identity which shape the micro and macro experiences of subjects. While I acknowledge the importance of differentiating between queer theory, feminist theory, and poststructuralism—the tensions that exist between the fields are real and significant—I also see the value in (re)joining them and drawing upon their diverse range of scholars to understand leadership within the university. Together, there are several assumptions that queer theory, feminist theory, and poststructuralism share that are useful for this approach, including a view of language as productive in constituting our realities and subjectivity, a skepticism of the Cartesian-Kantian humanist subject, and a critique of notions that appear as common sense or normal/natural. Furthermore, scholarship in each area devotes significant attention to socio-political-economic and historical conditions, with much recent work highlighting the complexities of the neoliberal moment (e.g., Besley & Peters, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Read 2011). Queer and feminist scholarship, in particular, have shown how neoliberalism has reshaped social movements and collective action for capitalist gain, co-opting both queerness and gender identity for profit (e.g., Duggan, 2003; Fraser, 2013; Spade, 2011; Sycamore, 2004). Thus, bringing QFP to bear on leadership discourse within the university seeks not to just describe the current state of leadership development but to trouble it; to disrupt the taken-for-grantedness of leadership as a natural order or desirable identity. In this project, queer, feminist, and poststructural theories offer a critique of leadership as a socially and historically constituted discourse, and as an important ideological technology that normalizes and legitimates the construction and maintenance of neoliberal relationships and subjectivity. But to say I aim to study leadership as a discourse that serves an ideological function that constitutes subjectivity requires some unpacking. In the next sections, queer feminist poststructural interpretations of discourse, power, ideology, and subjectivity are explored.
Discourse

The poststructural consideration of ‘discourse’ is credited to Michel Foucault who in his book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), moved beyond the structuralist concern with the sign/signifier relationship and began to map ‘the statement’ or ‘system of statements’ as the “primary building block of a discourse” (Mills, 1997, p. 60). Understanding these statements not as mere sentences but rather a series of utterances that take on a “regularity” or “an order” (p. 38), Foucault (1972) defined discourse as a “group of discursive statements which belong to a single system of formation” (p. 107). Although language is clearly a part of critical understandings of discourse, ‘discourse’ and ‘language’ are not interchangeable and it is too simplistic to see discourse theory as merely a concept of language, grammar, semiotics, or talk. Rather, the two work in relationship with one another as, “Meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language and language is not an abstract system, but always socially and historically located in discourses” (Weedon, 1997, p. 40). Foucault’s approach to discourse was less concerned with the actual utterances (the words used) than in the disciplinary and performative functions such utterances created and/or reflected (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Discourses are not just acts of speech, but what the experts say when speaking as experts, and are therefore taken seriously and have the effect of constituting and establishing truth claims (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Hence, while language is a central part of discourse theory, it is better to understand the poststructuralist notion of discourse not as “discourse-as-language” but “discourse-as-thought” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 49).

In this way, discourses serve performative functions which comprise and contribute to the formation of knowledge, objects, concepts, subject positions, other discourses, and discursive practices (Gillies, 2013). Indeed, discourses not only reflect culture, but “produce the object
about which they speak” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 61, original emphasis). Discourses are, for instance, where our identities or where our sense of self is constituted: where we come to understand what it means to be a mother, an immigrant, or a leader. Thus, our understandings of the world, our physicality, and our relationships, are perceived and experienced discursively. In this project, then, ‘discourse’ is understood as “a dynamic constellation of words and images that legitimate and produce a given reality” and that which emerges from the relationships between language, culture, power, and knowledge (Allan, 2003, p. 47).

Creating the Leadership Reality

To propose that discourses are productive of reality is not to deny a material world, but to recognize that the way we comprehend such reality is through discourse. In fact, part of the power of discourse lies in its ability to appear natural or commonsensical rather than a contingent, always in-flux way of accessing a reality. For example, the notion of leadership, or that there can be such a thing as a leader, is not seen not as a construction or discourse, but as an inherent or natural product of Western culture. It is often through learning about the acts of particular leaders, be it Martin Luther King Jr. or Mahatma Gandhi, that history is delineated. Contemporary crises are communicated as the direct result of failing leadership—as in 2006 when then-Senator Barack Obama stated “The fact that we are here today to debate raising America’s debt limit is a sign of leadership failure” (as cited in Linkins, 2010). Nevertheless, an incessant desire and demand for future innovative and emerging leaders is marked with the highest importance, signaled in the unrelenting push for STEM in higher education as a way for the US to remain a leader in the globalized marketplace. And the recent presidential election of 2016, brought the qualities of leadership to the forefront of national debate, with notions of gender, class, and race frequently surfacing to qualify one leader as more suitable for office than
the other. Kouzes and Posner in their bestselling leadership text, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations* (2007), even go so far as to say: “Without leadership there would not be the extraordinary efforts necessary to solve existing problems and realize unimagined opportunities” (p. 1). As a way to understand past histories, present crises, and future imperatives, then, it seems as though the US is unable to fathom a society without leadership.

However, although appearing as a natural, inherent part of culture, a poststructural consideration of leadership as a *discourse* instead understands leadership as a historically-, socially-, and culturally-constituted production of reality—one way in which we can access reality and understand our social world. Leadership then, is “kind of epiphenomenon that organizes and determines our experience of social reality and our experience of ourselves” rather than a unique characteristic in some actor or an intrinsic organization of society (Kelly, 2013, p. 908). And as a discourse, leadership produces subject positions, like leader, social practices in networking strategies and leadership conferences, as well as objects such as leadership books or organizations to be led. Leadership is not simply the product of several statements written on the subject (pun intended), but rather a discursive formation of multiple discourses that consist of their own distinct, yet related, utterances and statements. Popular leadership theories, including democratic leadership, servant leadership, and educational leadership are part of constituting leadership discourse, as well as the pervasive descriptors of leadership like vision, influence, and authenticity. Such theories or descriptors of leadership may operate as competing discourses, with the most powerful having strong institutional bases, say in medicine or education (which are themselves sites of discourse and contest) (Weedon, 1997).
Discourses as Historical and Contextual

Importantly, discourses, and the realities they produce, are not fixed, but fluid and change over time, making the historical context crucial to their comprehension. While structuralists, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, suggested that regardless of context or culture there is a universal, unconscious infrastructure to which all individuals adhere, poststructuralists examine language and meanings as socially and historically constituted. Derrida asserted that “[s]ignifiers are always located in a discursive context and the temporary fixing of meaning in a specific reading of a signifier depends on this discursive context” (Weedon, 1997, p. 25). For example, considering the performative nature of discourse, what it means to be a ‘real man’ today is not the same as what it meant centuries ago because discourses of masculinity and manhood change over time. While prior to the 17th century Western European men of high stature could wear high heels and makeup, today both of those aspects of appearance are reserved for women and seen as an unmanly act should a man choose to wear them.

While the ever-changing theories of leadership could be read as people further refining and advancing the concept of ‘leadership,’ a poststructural consideration of leadership as discourse understands the changing nature of leadership as reflective and productive of power relationship which are historically and culturally contingent. In this sense, leadership is not a naturally occurring element, impermeable to external influences, but a socio-historical production, where multiple discourses and power relationships at any given time coalesce to form what we consider acceptable or respectable in regards to leadership. Keith Grint’s (2011) discussion on the history of leadership is helpful in this regard, as he looks at how particular historical events determined which leadership styles became popular for that time. As an example, Grint (2011) describes how Communism in the 1920s and 1930s altered theories and
models of leadership to revolve around notions of a charismatic, normative leader. Grint (2011) states:

In other words, in an era when mass political movements driven by normative adherence to the collective will—but manifest in cult-like loyalty to the party leader—were so prominent, it seems perfectly natural to assume that the best way to lead an industrial organization was to mirror this assumption: work should be normatively rather than rationally organized—by groups led by leaders who prototypically embody the same apparent desires as those held by the mass. (p. 9)

Although, there are many ways to look at the historical shifts and their effects on leadership theories, a poststructural interpretation of leadership as a discourse demonstrates that rather than an autonomous, naturally occurring feature of our social structures and relationships, leadership is instead shaped by time or context.

Confirming the importance of the historical context, McHoul and Grace (1993) add that the other key component in understanding discourse is to map said discourse’s relationship to power/knowledge and ideology. As McHoul and Grace (1993) state:

In order to analyse or describe discursive rules, we must always turn to specific historical conditions – to the piecemeal, the local and the contingent. Events, no matter how specific, cannot just happen anyhow. They must happen according to certain constraints, rules or conditions of possibility. And these mean that discourses always function in relation to power relations. (p. 39, original emphasis)

In this way, discourses, both disciplining and disciplined by the historical conditions, and are consequently enabling and constraining of what can be sayable/thinkable and accepted as Truth or common sense at any given time (Storey, 2012). And it is in that enabling and constraining that power relationships become central to understanding leadership as a discourse, explored in the next section.

**Filling the Empty Signifier: Power/Knowledge and Ideology**

As a way of understanding our social world, a large amount of academic attention has been afforded to trying to define leadership, to identify the behaviors, traits, or processes which
constitute it. So what is leadership? In a widely-used quotation, eminent leadership scholar James MacGregor Burns’ (1978) states, “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (p. 2). Likewise, Bernard Bass and Ralph Stogdill (1974) assert, “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p. 259). After reviewing over 450 leadership studies and finding no conclusive definition of leadership, Brent Smith and Randall Peterson (1998) concluded that: “research into leadership has little to offer” (as cited in Khurana, 2007, p. 357). It seems that for a popular and profitable industry, a well-researched and established area of study, and what still seems to be—to quote the opening line of Bennis and Nanus’s 1985 canonical text, *Leaders*—“a word on everyone’s lips” (p. 1), what leadership is, remains undetermined (Grint, 2010; Kelly, 2013; Rost, 1993).

However, if we consider leadership as a discourse, then asking what leadership is might be the wrong question. According to CLS scholar Simon Kelly (2013), the nebulous and elusive definition of leadership results from the fact that the term ‘leadership’ is an “empty signifier *par excellence*” (p. 915). As an application of Saussure’s (1959) signifier, Kelly argues that leadership “can contain and express any number of possible definitions, characteristics, ontologies, epistemologies, subjects, objects, discourses and so on” (Kelly, 2013, p. 918). Although leadership language is ubiquitous—we see its messages on TV, in books, and our daily conversations—there is nothing necessarily tangible or identifiable for us to capture as ‘leadership.’ There must always be a person or something to represent leadership (Kelly, 2013). In this way, leadership is an “absent presence” in that it is not something that can be discovered or uncovered, but nevertheless remains a pervasive discourse (Kelly, 2013, p. 906). Traditional approaches then, which study leadership as an ontological object, will then inevitably fall short,
searching for the essence and reality of leadership where none exists. Kelly (2013) quips that it would make a “fascinating research methodology to walk into a large organization and ask its members ‘where is the leadership?’” (p. 913).

**Contingent Meaning and Power**

To say that leadership is an ‘empty signifier,’ however, should not suggest that leadership’s indiscernibility lends to open and equitable spaces for each individual to cast their own unique ideals of leadership, and for those ideals to be accepted by others or more broadly with equal weight and force. Instead, from a poststructural perspective, language, meanings, and signifiers are imbued with *power relationships* that are socially and historically contingent.

Traditionally, power has been understood in terms of ‘power-over,’ meaning to have power over others and the ability to make them do what you desire (Allen, 2011). It is typically theorized in terms of access, resources, or force and located in an individual’s ability to act in these capacities. Foucault (1990), however, moved away from viewing power in this way, or what he called the “repressive hypothesis” (p. 10). While he did not deny that power can be repressive, that it can restrict and can come from authority figures and institutions, he provides “an analysis that focuses not on the concentration of power in the hands of the sovereign or the state, but instead on how power flows through the capillaries of the social body” (Allen, 2011, p. 8). He stated: “power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1990, p. 93). “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality” (Foucault, 1977, p. 194). Thus, as an alternative to the power-over perspective, Foucault, argued that power was fluid, continually in relation, and operating through multiple subjects and technologies all the time. As such, it is
better to think of power as not possessed and repressive, but as exercised and productive in that “it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, 1995, p. 194).

This perspective on power also critically links poststructuralism with queer and feminist work on discourse. For instance, feminist poststructural reconsiderations of power as dispersed and relational challenged the (largely) liberal feminist interpretation of power as a resource, as well as the victim-oppressor model—one that sees all women as only ever the oppressed and all men as only ever the oppressors—popular in 1980’s white, feminist theory (e.g., MacKinnon, 1989). Rather than seeing power as something wielded by the privileged over the vulnerable, queer and feminist interpretations of the analytics of power recognize women are not only victims of a patriarchal society, but active participants in its construction and continuance (Mills, 1997). Women are “both subjects and agents within a sphere that is pre-constituted and, while ever-changing, affects the choices for expression of power, knowledge, language, and difference” (Allan, 2010, p. 21).

However, while feminist poststructuralists acknowledge that the patriarchal system constructs discursive practices broadly, they are “more concerned with mapping out the multiple sites where [patriarchal] power is enacted and negotiated” (Mills, 1997, p. 93). Over the past century, queer and feminist scholarship have provided nuanced accounts that deconstruct the various ways in which the university (Ahmed, 2012; Ferguson, 2012, 2015), language (Allan, 2010), history (Halberstam, 2005), and our very emotions (Ahmed, 2010; Cvetkovich, 2003) are constrained and constituted by power. In this way, feminist poststructuralism advances the poststructural project to see power as productive, dispersed, and continually in relation through
providing detailed critiques of power and how it operates in different contexts and across different bodies (Allan, 2010).

Power is also particularly productive in that it creates new knowledge (Peters & Burbules, 2004). However, power does not just produce knowledge, but is also produced by it, as power “depends on the knowledge it has constructed, and developed and promulgated” (Gillies, 2013, p. 12). To illustrate this “mutually generative relationship” (Gillies, 2013, p. 12), Foucault continually situated these words as connected by using ‘power/knowledge.’ This relationship is intricately tied to discourse, seeing discourse as the place where power and knowledge are mobilized, mediated, and come together to produce what we perceive as reality and ‘Truth’ (Foucault, 1990). In other words, what we perceive as “truth is an effect of power/knowledge operating through discourse” (Allan, 2010, p. 17, original emphasis). Understood in this way, ‘truth’ is a construction that is involved in regulating and disciplining our realities or what Foucault (1994) refers to as the ‘conditions of possibility.’ As Allan (2010) explains, “Together, power/knowledge and discourse provide conditions of possibility—the conditions necessary to think of ourselves, and our world, in particular ways and not in other ways” (p. 17). Thus, power/knowledge and discourses discipline and produce limits on what can be said, thought, and conceived of as true.

In relation to leadership, power/knowledge and discourse produce what can be said and thought about leadership, as well as the particular ways in which the ‘leader’ subject position can be comprehended. For leadership to be considered a discourse, or formation of discourses, requires that certain ideas of leadership be broadly understood or regarded with credibility. Hence, although it is acknowledged that leadership operates differently across contexts and no one definition of leadership is agreed upon, particular expectations or norms of leadership—from
the images of leaders to its acceptable practices—can still be widely shared and understood at any given time (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013). Power/knowledge and the subsequent ‘regimes of truth’ it expresses—the norms of leadership that constitute and are constituted by certain discursive practices during a particular historical period—structure our interpretations of ‘good’ leadership from ‘bad’ leadership across various spaces (Gillies, 2013). In this project, queer and feminist research, in particular, bring to the forefront the power relationships imbued within our widely shared and understood notions of leadership and examines how its particular expectations or norms—from the images of leaders to its acceptable practices—can be exclusionary or discriminatory (e.g., Collinson 2011; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Prasad, 2012; Rumens, 2016).

Specifically, QFP looks at how power, discourse, and subjectivity operate through difference and draws our attention to the gendered, raced, classed, ableist, and ageist discursive practices that constantly circulate in our institutions (Ahmed, 2012). With a QFP lens we may ask then: What other discourses are used, sacrificed, or revered to make leadership matter? To give leadership meaning? To give leadership power? And if power/knowledge, through and within discourses, tell us the ‘truth’ about leadership, who’s truth is it? This is where the ideological function of leadership comes into play.

**Ideology**

In conjunction with the fact that the vast amount of research on the subject has yet to reveal leadership as one identifiable, natural, or observable object, there is also very little consistency regarding the strategies for, or effectiveness of, developing people into leaders (whatever that may mean). In the 1970s and 80s, Bass and Stogdill (1974) surveyed more than 4,700 studies and found no solid framework for the field. Since then, numerous scholars have noted the general lack of any cohesive, unified understandings regarding whether leadership can
be taught, and if it can, the best strategies for doing so (e.g., Kellerman, 2012; Khurana, 2007). When looking at how effective leadership development is on university campuses, the situation is similarly ambiguous. In a study by Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, & Arensdorf (2006), the authors noted that of the Leadership Studies majors offered at 15 universities, there were several disparate models in terms of requirements, what scholars they drew from to form their programs, and by extension, whether the curriculum focused more on theory or training. Thus, at least from “a scholarly perspective, then, leadership as a body of knowledge, after decades of scholarly attention . . . remains without either a widely accepted theoretical framework or a cumulative empirical understanding leading to a usable body of knowledge” (Khurana, 2007, p. 357). This raises an important question then: If an established definition of leadership remains elusive, and there is no evidence as to whether leadership can be taught, why have universities dedicated so much time, energy, resources, and focus to developing students as leaders?

Kelly’s analysis of leadership as an empty signifier can provide insight on the answer to this question as well. After accepting Kelly’s (2013) claim that leadership is an empty signifier, “[w]hat is required then is not just an acknowledgement of empty signifiers, but a means of identifying the work and politics that are performed in their name” (Kelly, 2013, p. 915). In this way, rather than considering leadership as something stable or a physical, identifiable object, Kelly (2013) proposes that leadership is instead a social construction, and even more specially, an ideological tool. The initial concept of ideology is often credited to Marxist scholar Louis Althusser, who theorized “the means by which individuals are governed by the ideological state apparatuses in the interests of the ruling class” (Weedon, 1997, p. 30). Ideology works by interpelling individuals as subjects through language. For instance, Althusser (1971) gives the
example of police calling out to someone through the phrase: “Hey, you there!” (as cited in Weedon, 1997, p. 30). This call interpellates or hails the individual, thus making them the subject of the ‘you’ in the phrase. In this way, interpellation operates through the process of false consciousness or misrecognition, “misrecognition in the sense that the individual . . . assumes that she is the author of the ideology which constructs her subjectivity” (Weedon, 1997, p. 30, original emphasis). Like ideology, contemporary leadership discourse interpellates subjects through rhetoric in the form of “there’s a leader in you!” However, according to Kelly (2013), leadership is not an ideology per se, but rather ideological or encompassing of multiple ideological practices or functions. Kelly (2013) states:

> This is the power of leadership—not its ontological reality as personality, relation, practice or process—but its ideological function to organize, direct, deflect, categorize, centralize, marginalize, inspire, control, liberate, improve, stimulate, seduce, transform, stabilize, threaten, protect and reassure . . . we might say that leadership does not deal in content or substance, but in the organization, containment and reproduction of desire. (p. 912, original emphasis)

As an empty signifier, ‘leadership’ has the ability to deliver multiple ideological effects. Kelly’s interpretation of leadership as having an ideological function falls in line with more recent queer and feminist considerations of ideology. Moving away from orthodox Marxist understandings of ideology and interpellation as a unidirectional process whereby individuals are deceived into participating in systems that are not in their best interest, a QFP reformulation suggests that, ideology, “rather than being a uniform straightjacket imposed on people, constituted a shifting, contested terrain” (Saukko, 2003, p. 101). Ideology is not a forceful, top-down imposition by the ruling class, but a process by which dominant morals, values, and rules are willingly adopted by a wide range of people—made to believe it is in their best interest. In this way, QFP theories acknowledge that dominant discourses and ideologies are not generated, accepted, and perpetuated by some abstracted set of limits or by some evil few, but also by subjects
themselves—that we are both constituted by and constituting of discourse and ideology.

“Becoming subject, the individual both takes on and comes under ideology’s structure of beliefs and expectations” (Dean, 2014, p. 3).

Kelly’s argument that leadership serves an ideological function is especially useful for understanding how for a concept so incoherent, undefined, and least understood by scholars, leadership discourse has come to be seen as applicable, useful, and desired across a variety of spaces. It lets us see how leadership gets to be “anything anyone wants to say it is” (Rost, 1993, p. 14). And in this way, leadership can be made useful across various contexts and spaces while simultaneously retaining coherence and power as concept. We can see how this might work, for instance, in Jack Halberstam’s (1998) conception of gender. Halberstam (1998) explains:

In a way, gender’s very flexibility and seeming fluidity is precisely what allows dimorphic gender to hold sway. Because so few people actually match any given community standards for male and female, in other words, gender can be imprecise and therefore multiply relayed through a solidly binary system. At the same time, because the definitional boundaries of male and female are so elastic, there are very few people in any given public space who are completely unreadable in terms of their gender. (p. 20)

As the fluidity of gender appears to reinscribe the importance of the binary, leadership’s elasticity as an idea appears to maintain its pervasiveness and reproduction as a powerful discourse. The lack of clarity on the definition of leadership or the most effective way to teach it has not stopped the ever-increasing presence of leadership development efforts, scholarship, and programming on university campuses across the country—as discussed in the introduction.

Rather, the opposite is true: the more malleable the definition of leadership and its practices, the more its prevalence increases across campuses. It is the very “fragmentation and incompleteness that arguably gives discourses of leadership their longevity” (Kelly, 2013, p. 912). While coherent and definitive ideologies can be directly challenged or become antiquated
over time, “the ideological practices of leadership can be endlessly recycled, adapted, applied and reworked to fit any purpose” (Kelly, 2013, p. 912).

If we look at the history of the development of leadership we can see the ideological component of leadership at work. Thinking of leadership as an ideological tool, along with the notion that discourses produce truth and reality, we find leadership change depending on the prevailing cultural or historical context. As Kelly (2013) explains:

It may be why the leadership studies of the 1980s reflected the need to confront the twin threats of unionization and Japanese competition, resulting in the invention of the US and European manager-as-transformational-leader (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). This would also account for why the current interest in authenticity, ethics, corporate social responsibility and sustainability reflects today’s need to tackle the global economic crisis and the challenges of a changing natural environment. (p. 913)

Leadership becomes filled with a particular meaning or essence to fit the socio-political-economic demands of the moment. Thus, when studying leadership as a discourse which serves an ideological function, it is important to focus one’s examination within a specific context and time period. In relation to the study at hand, if we understand leadership as this historically-contingent ideological instrument, we can begin to interrogate why, now, leadership is so widely encouraged for students in higher education. Defined ideologically rather than ontologically, we can also look at contemporary leadership discourse as the discursive formation of other ideological formations such as scientism, patriarchy, racism, ableism, and colonialism. For example, we can consider how leadership’s historical ties to colonialist formations has informed the constitution of the contemporary transnational managerial class. Like colonialist discourse that justified imperialism in salvific terms, some leadership theories justify leadership as an act of social justice or transformation (e.g., Burns, 1978; Komives & Wagner, 2009). As such, we might ask if there is a connection between the expansion of neoliberal global capitalism and leadership imperatives that promise to save the world. More broadly, though, we can ask: How
has the epoch of neoliberalism shaped the functions of leadership? What does the neoliberal moment demand of leadership? Before continuing this discussion, it is important to take brief detour to talk about the theoretical handling of neoliberalism in this project.

**Neoliberalism.** Originating with the work of Austrian philosopher Friedrich Hayek, economists Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and Gary Becker, among others, developed the Chicago School approach to economics and established what we have come to recognize as neoliberal economics in America today (Peters, 2001). In brief, neoliberalism is a set of economic policies that center the market as the arbiter of equality and freedom, advances open and unencumbered global trade, and advocates for minimal government involvement (Besley & Peters, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Melamed, 2011; Peters, 2001). However, critical scholars (see Couldry, 2008; Ong, 2006; Read, 2009, 2011) have discussed the ways in which neoliberalism “reimagined not just economic transactions and resources but also social and individual relations, the dynamics of affect and emotion, modes of social and political resistance, and the terrain of culture itself” (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 9). More than just a mode of governance or economic policy, neoliberal understandings have become imbued within other non-fiscal arenas of life including our socializing institutions, values, and discourses. For instance, Henry Giroux (2011) declares that, “market-driven values and their accompanying power-shaping institutions now profoundly influence the very nature of how Americans think, act, and desire” (p. 69). Neoliberalism, then, is not an abstract set of economic policies, but an affective, socializing force that has essentially extended market processes to, or financialized human bodies for, all areas of social life.

Considering that the circulating economic principles, institutions, our very emotions, identities, and most all other aspects of life are now material for analyses of neoliberal
encroachment, research on the subject has proliferated in the 21st century. With no strict or singular definition, within research, neoliberalism has been used by many as a bit of a shorthand for scholars looking to critique the practices of the International Monetary Fund or comment on the general enclosures of capitalism. In fact, in some academic circles ‘neoliberalism’ has become somewhat of a pejorative, deemed “a dismal epithet . . . imprecise and over-used” (Watkins, 2010, p. 7). However, Jamie Peck (2010) argues that the obscurity of “neoliberalism,” does not speak to the concept’s lack of integrity, but rather its power.

Just because neoliberalism is not a universal and ubiquitous phenomenon; just because it is not a monolithic, unilogical, and free of contradiction; . . . just because neoliberalism does not, indeed cannot, satisfy these absolutists, hyperbolic criteria, this does not mean that it is a figment of the (critical) imagination. From a slightly different perspective, the contested and unstable character of the signifier itself might actually reveal something about the nature of the signified processes, phenomena, and practices. The tangled mess that is the modern usage of neoliberalism may be telling us something about the tangled mess of neoliberalism itself. (Peck, 2010, p. 15)

The elusive constitution of neoliberalism tells us something about the process of neoliberalism itself, Peck insists. That perhaps the power of neoliberalism lies in its inability to be generalized, fully dissected, and that its unfulfilled promises, paradoxes, and failures only work to strengthen its grasp on our social and collective consciousness’s rather than challenge them. Perhaps then, the point of critical work on neoliberalism should not be to definitively identify or define neoliberalism, but to follow the varying, yet pervasive, tentacles that constitute the neoliberal terrain.

With this in mind, this project proceeds from a place that treats neoliberalism as “contradictory and polymorphic”—not as any one thing, but rather something that can only be understood by mapping its “movements, and to triangulate between its ideological, ideational, and institutional currents, between philosophy, politics, and practice” (Peck, 2010, p. 8). To illuminate neoliberalism as more than just a moment in time or abstract economic principles, I
adopt Peck’s (2010) term “neoliberalization” throughout the chapters to illuminate neoliberalism as a web of processes, interrelated and ever-evolving. I also draw on Peck’s (2010) approach to examining the neoliberal terrain, which “involves exposing and exploring some of the ‘connective tissues’ of the neoliberalization process, their contingent textures and creative tensions” (p. 34). Specifically, in this project, I explore the neoliberalization of both the educational landscape of the university and leadership discourse that circulates within it.

Moreover, there is no singular point of origin—“no ground-zero”—for neoliberalism, nor does neoliberalism operate in the same way across all spaces (Peck, 2010, p. 8). For instance, although in dialogue with one another, the “European strains” of neoliberalism differ from those in Chile, China, and even the US (Peck, 2010). Queer and feminist theorists have made clear the importance of nuancing one’s analysis to focus on a specific context as it highlights how power relationships can shift across bodies and across context (for good examples, see Ropers-Huilman, 2010 or Talburt, 2010). While in the business arena, leadership discourse may be openly expressive of other discourses such as professionalism, competition, masculinity, and individualism, in moving to an educational setting, it would be important to map the ways in which leadership discourse has had to incorporate ideas of democracy, citizenship, and social good within its definition and practices. How then has the shaping of leadership discourse within the university come to change how we see the ‘leader’ position or recognize the ‘best practices’ of leadership for students? In the case of this examination, the neoliberal moment from about the 1970s until the present is the time period under scrutiny, as well as the university context. Though neoliberalism did not necessarily create the market/economic logics that undergird leadership discourse, it did amplify and reshape the discourse in particular and important ways that remain prevalent in university leadership development practices and theory today.
Subjectivity, Difference, and Identity

Another effect of power is the individual, or what poststructuralists intentionally refer to as the *subject* (Mills, 1997). Foucault (1980) states that “the individual is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects” (p. 98). In contrast to the Cartesian-Kantian humanism, which presumes individuals are rational, autonomous, and free-thinking, poststructuralists see individuals, or subjects, as constituted within (but also constituting of, explored later) discourse. This view is sometimes referred to as anti-foundationalism or anti-essentialism. The subject is not separate from history or the master of their fate, but rather it is through discourse that one becomes an ‘I,’ where our sense of self-hood is formed (see Allan, 2010; Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1997). In this way, there is no human essence, no essential nature, but only the subject constituted through language and systems of discourse.

Importantly, poststructuralists argue that there is no ‘outside’ that exists beyond the discursive structures and formations in place. A subject cannot simply “accomplish a triumphant jump out of culture,” and become their own unique self in ways that are outside of the prevailing discourses and power/knowledge relationships (Schoene, 2006, p. 284). As Butler (2005) states, “There is no making oneself (*poiesis*) outside of a mode of subjection (*assujettisement*) and, hence, no self-making outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take” (p. 17, original emphasis). These ‘possible forms’ are often called subject positions or social identities. Luke (1995) notes some examples of these, stating: “it is through discourse, that one learns to recognize, represent, and ‘be,’ for instance a ‘rapper,’ a ‘learning disabled,’ a ‘loyal American’” (as cited in Allan, 2010, p. 15). Leadership as a discourse produces ‘leaders’ as yet another social category or identity that subjects can be assigned or willingly take up. However, as discourses create the conditions of possibility, not all available subject positions are
conceivable, and the ones that are, may not be available for all subjects to adopt equally or without consequence. As Weedon (1987) explains:

Whereas, in principle, the individual is open to all forms of subjectivity, in reality individual access and subjectivity is governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society. Social relations, which are always relations of power and powerlessness between different subject positions, will determine the range and forms of subjectivity immediately open to any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, age and cultural background. (p. 95)

Discourse, linked with power, thus disciplines what is seen as legitimate or normal for particular subject positions. Within leadership, then, the ‘leader’ subject position is not one that all can inhabit or have access in the same way.

Indeed, to inhabit the subject position of a leader means to not only embody and perform as a not-follower, but to act according to the discursive rules that discourses of leadership have ascribed to a ‘leader.’ If the ‘leader’ position is filled by someone different from the dominant image, such as a woman, then their adoption of the leadership role will either produce them as an unsuccessful leader or an imposter. A study done in 2009 by Gordon, Iverson and Allan demonstrates how leadership discourse creates some identities as impostors or less-than adequate leaders. Gordon, Iverson and Allan (2009) investigated the various discourses used in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to examine how women leaders were framed within its many articles. They found that women are often framed as caretakers and vulnerable leaders, or as ‘experts’ based on hegemonic masculine and feminine discourses. As caretakers, women are often discussed as mothers or wives, emphasizing their supposed nurturing and supportive nature, whereas, as vulnerable leaders, women are made to seem as if always susceptible to discrimination and attacks. Shaping women as experts involves language that emphasizes women’s credentials, work experience, or other authoritative positions in order to show “women leaders as having access to ‘real power’”—a power that is decidedly male and dictated by
masculinist standards (Gordon, Iverson, & Allan, 2009, p. 92). As a result, Gordon, Iverson, and Allan (2009) show that “an inherent gender tension emerges as expectations about professionalism are largely shaped through the discourse of dominant masculinity” (p. 93). Gordon, Iverson, and Allan (2009) also point out that the tension between masculine and feminine discourses place women leaders in a “double bind” (pg. 90) where they are stuck between being seen as either too feminine, and thus incompetent, or too masculine, positioning them as “controversial” or “outspoken” (p. 91). Their study, as well as others, reiterate how discourses constitute subject positions that are disciplining and restrictive. When individuals who do not express the desired traits take up leader positions, they become seen as an imposter or improper leader and thus cannot inhabit the leader subject position in the same way as other identities.

Consequently, the biased images of leaders produce material consequences for those who do not conform to ‘commonsense’ leader expectations. While poststructuralism has been critiqued for dismissing material reality or conditions, including within queer and feminist theory, queer and feminist work has also extended poststructuralism through politicizing notions of discourse and power, connecting them with the production of material and corporeal, gendered realities. They show, “discourse is not just a form of representation; it is a material condition (or set of conditions) which enables and constrains the socially productive ‘imagination’” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 34, original emphasis). Indeed, not appearing leaderly enough can have material implications, as someone’s perception of another as a leader can enable or constrain pay, promotion, respect, and/or organizing. Not seeing women, for example, as capable of being leaders has resulted in unequal pay for women in leader roles or a general lack of women in leadership positions (American Association of University Women,
2016). As such, this project considers leadership as socially-, culturally-, and historically-contingent, disciplined by prevailing norms, understood as common sense, and imbued with power—linguistic, or otherwise—to produce, act, and inspire material consequences.

Nevertheless, the naturalization of leadership as an inherent part of culture lends itself to situating the characteristics ascribed to ‘leaders’ as similarly natural or normal. That is to say, what constitutes a competent or effective leader has become widely understood, discussed, and disseminated and therefore unbiased facts or common sense. However, from a QFP perspective, the various traits or characteristics assigned are not natural but rather raced, classed, and gendered—among other things. Historically, leadership theories and models have been based around white, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper-class men’s experiences and have thus produced an image of the model leader in a similar fashion. However, this view of subject positions and subjectivity is further complicated by the fact that the identity markers such as race, gender, or sexual orientation that individuals are defined by are themselves also discursively constituted. While often the markers of identity—race, sex, gender—are presumed to be biological realities, queer and feminist poststructural scholars argue these identifiers are socially, historically, and culturally created categories (Butler, 1990; Fausto-Sterling, 1993; Scott, 1991). Challenging notions that there is a unique essence to the individual or that categories we use to describe our identities are natural or merely reflective of reality, queer feminist poststructuralists often turn to history to illuminate the emergence of identities or categories of identity and identification. For instance, Foucault (1990) in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, illustrated the ways in which sexuality or ‘the homosexual’ was a 19th century creation. This was not to suggest that there were not people engaging in sexual acts with others of the same sex prior to this time, but that what we conceive of as ‘homosexual’—the category to represent a sexual act—was instead an
effect of power/knowledge and their interplay with medical and scientific discourses (Foucault, 1990).

The structures of our language, in part, also constitute the ‘differences’ that we come to perceive as natural or pre-ordained. Poststructural considerations of signs/signifiers suggest that “the meaning of signs is not intrinsic but relational” in that meaning is constructed through difference—that signs develop meaning through their opposition with other signs (Weedon, 1997, p. 23). This differentiation in signs is imbued with power relationships that constitute and characterizes the hierarchized binaries that undergird much of Modernist thinking (e.g. reason/emotion, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual). While one side of the binary is read as positive in some light—strong, powerful, good, right—the other side is then read as the opposite—weak, submissive, bad, wrong. ‘Woman’, ‘black,’ and ‘queer’ are, not surprisingly, consistently found on the side of binary seen as lacking.

Such binary thinking is exceptionally clear in leadership as well. For instance, we know what it means to be a leader by understanding what it means to be its opposite, a follower, and vice versa. For example, that the leader is powerful and exists in contrast to their followers who are the leader’s lesser opposite is commonplace in leadership studies. Gordon (2011) notes that:

[T]his dualistic and apolitical approach to the relationship between leaders and followers is just that, implicit; conditioned through the practice of leadership. One could argue that the superiority of leaders has become assumed as being part of the natural order of things. (p. 197)

As an ever-changing signifier, leadership continues to establish its meaning through a constant process of differentiation with other signs/signifiers: leadership/followership, leadership/management, transformational leadership/transactional leadership, and so on. As such, acts of differentiation serve disciplinary functions in their deployment of boundaries,
creating dividing practices for the self, where one’s self is defined by that which it is not. In this way, “[t]he subject is constructed through acts of differentiation” (Butler, 1992, p. 12).

By using an anti-essentialist frame, queer and feminist theories stake a certain distance from limited notions of identity and bring our attention to the normalizing, exclusionary, and even violent powers that emerge when the markers of identity are used as political platforms. For instance, queer and feminist theorists have launched scathing critiques of the identity-based political assemblages that mark the ‘progressive’ activisms of the 20th and 21st centuries (e.g. Butler, 1990; Spade, 2011; Sycamore, 2004; Warner, 1999). With a move to critique identity also comes the move to question in what ways our liberal politics enable and maintain normalizing practices: to see politics as a site of normalization. Just as Butler (1990) was critical of the feminist politics in the 1990s, fearing “that it presumes, fixes, and constrains the very ‘subjects’ that it hopes to represent and liberate” (p. 203), other queer and feminist scholars continue to question the equality movements of today which opt for identity-based inclusion—primarily in the institutions of marriage, military, and adoption (Sycamore, 2004). They argue that movements that seek inclusion (mainly legislative) into pre-established institutions operate off an assimilative platform, and one that reifies dominant culture as the gold standard by which all others must compare themselves (Sycamore, 2004). For instance, the lesbian and gay marriage movement was “centered more on obtaining straight privilege than challenging power” (Sycamore, 2004, p. 1). Critical of propagating empty notions of community or identity-politics as a means for inclusion—as it has the potential to ignore differences in favor of a homogenous narrative—queer and feminist theorists are not invested in a politics of sameness but in “a troubling politics” (Chambers & Carver, 2008, p. 1). As potential alternatives, queer and feminist theorists have reimagined utopian and democratic narratives,
occupying the space of the “not-yet-here” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 12; O’Rourke, 2015a). Butler, for example, advocates for ‘radical democracy,’ where democracy is not seen as unity, the resolution of political differences, or a teleological project, but a site of permanent struggle (O’Rourke, 2015a). Queer theorists investigate the potentials of contestation as a form of utopianism, where we strive for something we will never actually achieve, or as Derrida (2006) stated, “the democracy to come” (p. 81). It can also then provide us with potential strategies of reimagining leadership outside of the common frameworks, such as ones which de-center and de-individualize the leader subject position.

Noting the limitations of identity and equality politics, some feminist theorists have argued that their work does not have to take gender as its “proper object” in order to make an analysis feminist (Butler, 1994, p. 6). Similarly, “[c]ontrary to how it’s occasionally construed, queer theory is most emphatically not equivalent to the study of homosexuality” (Schoene, 2006, p. 292). Rather, “‘queer’ gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual” (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). The insistence that queer or feminist theories only help women and queer-identified subjects, is not only misleading, but also continues to keep invisible intersectionality and that which the two actually critique: systems, such as patriarchy and heteronormativity. In relation to this study then, these frameworks are not applied so that we may eventually discover ways to make women better leaders or to help more lesbian and gay individuals obtain leadership positions. But rather investigations that look into how power, discourse, and subjectivity operate already by extension draw our attention to the gendered, raced, classed, ableist, and ageist discursive practices that constantly circulate in our institutions (Ahmed, 2012). A QFP framework brings attention to the discursive practices that leadership discourse enables and is enabled by, and how they come to engage subjects in their own
subjection in ways that intersect with the discourses of race, class, gender, sex, sexuality, age, ability, and so on.

**Constituted By and Constituting Of**

Contrary to Marxist and structuralist interpretations, subjects are not constantly stuck in discourse as the bearers of its rules and restrictions, but are active participants “constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). Because discourse is something we embody and *do*, there is an “interactional relation of power rather than an imposition of power” (Mills, 1997, p. 88). Subjects are not mired in discourses, but are able to engage in their subjectivity through, for instance, technologies of self. To become, for example, a leader, requires that individuals engage in their own subjectivity; to engage the ‘I.’ Later in his career, Foucault became very interested in what he called ‘technologies of the self’ which regard the ways in which subjects invest in their own subjection (Behrent, 2013). To clarify, ‘technology,’ as Foucault used it, does not refer to modern technological devices, such as computers or iPhones, “but rather to methods and procedures for governing human beings” (Behrent, 2013, p. 55). Technologies are “an assembly of means of judgment,” that often create some “reformation and cure” and include “apparatuses within which intervention is to take place” (Rose, 1999, p. xi). More specifically then, technologies of the self are those:

> which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1988, p. 18)

As such, technologies of the self may appear in the form of therapy or plastic surgery, or in instances where individuals rely on experts to help them become their best selves through trainings and/or workshops. Even the university is a site of commodity production as individuals ‘invest’ in their education to better themselves, to become a professional. Contemporary
leadership, as expressly concerned with ‘developing’ leaders through self-making practices, assessment tools, and reflective activities, thus actively seeks to build the subject through deploying technologies of subjectivity, encouraging individuals to mold themselves into a leader through practices that obligate them to engage in self work. Thus, this argument applies Foucault’s applications of technologies of power and the self to examine how leadership functions as one that invokes “a certain shaping of conduct” and governs the subject through “lines of connection amongst a diversity of types of knowledge, forces, capacities, skills, disposition and types of judgment,” particularly neoliberal ones (Rose, 1999, p. 52).

Important in understanding technologies of the self are the historical and contextual conditions within which such practices are carried out. As Besley and Peters (2007) assert, “we cannot approach the question of the self without locating it within the network of values and social practices that come to characterize a culture at a particular time” (p. 5). If examining leadership development within the university then, it is important not only to look at which self-making practices are deployed, but also how they come to make sense within the neoliberal era and context. Recognizing, again, that it is through discourse where we form our senses of self, we must consider what neoliberalism makes us do to ourselves; the limits of subjectivity neoliberalism enables and constrains, and how we must abide by and conform to neoliberal notions of life and living in order to be intelligible or have intelligible lives. To observe neoliberalism as a condition of possibility that produces as much as it forecloses, we might ask then what kinds of subjects neoliberalism engenders. QFP scholars have been crucial in showing the ways in which neoliberalism produces the subject of freedom (Crain, 2013; Rose, 1999) and the subject of work (McGee, 2005; Weeks, 2011). The neoliberal figures of homo economicus, the responsibilized self, and the entrepreneurial subject have also been expanded upon (Besley &
Peters, 2007; Brown, 2015b). For instance, Besley and Peters (2007) argues that neoliberalism encourages a form of subjectivity that responsibilizes the individual as a self-regulating and self-governing servant of the economic order, or what they call the responsibilized self. It is important then for this project to further examine the particular forms of these technologies of self-making in leadership, and how they may reify neoliberal understandings of personhood.

Conclusion

Together, a queer feminist poststructural approach illuminates how leadership as a discourse can serve to deploy technologies of *neoliberal subjectivity* by creating new modes of critique, alternative methodologies, and radical ruptures in the scientific rationalist discourse that informs leadership development in the university currently. As the previous sections illustrated, QFP uses critical frames together in order to reveal that subject positions (like ‘leader’) are created, informed, and governed within and by discourses (that are themselves, historically and contextually contingent). However, modernist critiques of poststructuralist interpretations of subjectivity often claim that if there is no ‘outside’ of discourse then agency is foreclosed. That if we accept reality and the individual as constituted only through discourses then political resistance and the agency of the individual—the ability for a person to make their own choices—is also disregarded (see Alcoff, 1990; Benhabib, 1992). Sometimes, this criticism is subsumed within the overarching claim that poststructuralist thought is inevitably nihilistic, in that if there is no outside of discourse then there is no way to change anything and no agency for the individual to enact said change. However, to question the constitution of something is not the same as erasing it, and to see it in this way reverts back once again to binary thinking where one is either entirely autonomous or wholly controlled by power (Butler, 1992). As Jill Blackmore (1999) clarifies, “To be *constituted* by discourses is not to be *determined* by discourse” (p. 17,
original emphasis). Instead, the subject is both constituted by power and discourses, but also constituting of power and discourse. Furthermore, poststructural theories of discourse—seen as the culprit depriving us of agency—is actually the very place that provides transformative possibilities. As Butler (1992) states “to claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency” (p. 12). In other words, if nothing is ordained or natural, then everything can change—not necessarily disappear, but change. If we examine leadership as a discourse, then, we see it as actively involved in shaping our relationships, practices, and perceptions of ourselves—which in turn actively engages us in the reconstituting of a leadership formation.
CHAPTER THREE: THE LEADERSHIP ARCHIVE

This project uses a qualitative approach to examine leadership discourse and development practices in the US university. Guided by a queer feminist poststructural lens (QFP) as described in Chapter 2, several strategies of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), including personal narrative, textual analysis, and critical historiography, are employed within this project to analyze what I am describing as an archive of leadership. This particular approach to studying leadership assists me in recognizing and representing leadership as a socially and historically constituted discourse— informed by and in relation with other discourses of modernity—and as an important ideological technology that normalizes and legitimates the construction and maintenance of neoliberal relationships and subjectivity within the American university.

Often, the methods researchers choose to employ are a reflection of their theoretical and epistemological frameworks (Fine, 1994). Since leadership has largely been conceptualized as a naturally occurring entity or discernable object that can be scientifically measured, quantitative methodologies are predominantly used in leadership research. For instance, noting the overuse of questionnaires as a method within Leadership Studies, Alan Bryman (2011) asserts that “[t]he dominance of this tool and other quantitative instruments reflects the wider epistemological orientation of many leadership researchers in that it exemplifies the commitment to a natural science model of the research process and to positivism in particular” (p. 15). Most popular leadership theories, from trait approaches to contingency models, now have their own specific surveys, tests, or other quantitative measurements for assessing effective leadership. For instance, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test can supposedly be used to

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gauge the emotional intelligence of a leader, and for a read on an individual’s leadership style, the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire or Leadership Grid can be administered (Northouse, 2007). Indeed, the idea that leadership can and should be studied using quantitative methods has largely taken hold in Leadership Studies.

This project, on the other hand, which brings QFP to bear on leadership discourse within the university, requires methodologies rooted in qualitative rather than quantitative paradigms. Often set in opposition to the hyper-rational, objective, and systematic inquiry associated with quantitative research, qualitative research “stress[es] the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 4). While positivist and/or quantitative researchers typically propose that with the proper methodology in place, the researcher can distance themselves from the study and allow for the results to merely reflect material reality, qualitative researchers reject notions of objectivity and acknowledge the involvement of the researcher (biases and all) within the process. Moreover, rather than apolitically (re)presenting the world, the qualitative tradition recognizes that all research (including those conducted in the sciences) is ideologically and politically entangled, and as such can serve to maintain the status quo and/or become a form of transgression. As Patti Lather (2001) asserts, “research which is openly value based is neither more nor less ideological than mainstream positivist research” (p. 350).

Hence, as approaches to studying leadership have overwhelmingly relied on positivist epistemologies—and their corresponding methodologies—questions regarding the discourses and ideologies that inform popular understandings of leadership have been left unexamined. So while most studies on leadership typically ask what makes an effective leader, or what traits are
found in all leaders, the theoretical frames of QFP demands that leadership researchers ask different questions and employ alternative qualitative methodologies to investigate them. As such, this dissertation poses the following questions:

a. How is leadership recognized and understood in the university?
b. What are the purposes of leadership development in higher education?
c. What are the dominant discourses that shape, reflect, and produce understandings and experiences of leadership discourse and leadership development in the university?
d. How has the neoliberal context shaped the particular practices and purposes of leadership development in the university?

These questions acknowledge the socio-historical production of leadership and its political significance. When interrogated more thoroughly, such questions provide insight into the maintenance of power amongst particular groups, as well as the ways in which individuals may participate in their own subjection through leadership discourse.

One of the main goals of this research then is to recognize and understand the complex relationship between leadership and the university. My research does not ask what traits or behavioral techniques are found in the best leaders, but rather, what purpose does valuing particular traits over others serve during particular times or in specific contexts? The goal is not to determine whether developing student leaders is a worthy or practical endeavor, but to instead ask why such an endeavor is carried out in the university, and with such vigor. Engaging programming or interactive workshops may be the best way to develop student leaders on campuses, but why do we care about developing students as leaders, and what comes to ‘count’ as leadership in the first place?

In the sections that follow, I describe this project’s methodology to illustrate why this particular approach—counter to traditional research methods—is most appropriate for examining the current state of leadership discourse and development in higher education in the 21st century. First, I introduce the theoretical underpinnings of my methodology, including how I
conceptualize the university as an archive, and how this understanding brings attention to leadership as a discourse that shapes our relationships, subjectivity, and understandings of reality. I then provide a sketch of my methods for analysis. I describe how Sara Ahmed’s (2012) *ethnography of texts* informs my approach to not only data collection, but also the particular materials I select to include in my leadership archive for analysis. Following that, I outline my *scavenger methodology* (Halberstam, 1998) where I combine critical discourse analytic strategies of personal narrative, close and thematic readings of texts, and critical historiography as methods for mapping leadership discourse in the university. Finally, I close by discussing how these methods work in combination with one another, and summarize the chapter. It is important to note though that while I have separated out my theoretical and methodological frameworks into different chapters in this dissertation, theory and method are connected throughout in this study.

**Constituting the Leadership Archive: Following, Wandering, and Hoarding**

Guided by this project’s research questions, I used a QFP lens to shape and analyze an *archive of leadership*. While archives are traditionally thought of as literal places where important documents are stored and catalogued, this dissertation draws on queer scholarship (e.g., Berlant, 1997; Cvetkovich, 2003; Ferguson, 2012; Foucault, 1972; Muñoz, 1996; Rodríguez, 2014) that has broadened the definition of what counts as an ‘archive’ and what materials deserve to be archived. For example, when studying the transgender body Judith ‘Jack’ Halberstam (2005) drew on queer subculture and art to construct a new archive and thus reconfigure queer histories. Halberstam (2005) states: “The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity” (p. 169). Similarly, feminist and queer scholars have broadened notions of ‘the
archive’ to create archives of feelings (Cvetkovich, 2003), of gestures (Rodríguez, 2014), and of the ephemeral (Muñoz, 1996).

In his work on the incorporation of marginalized students in the university, Roderick Ferguson (2012) brought attention to the active role the university plays in creating or serving as an archive. Ferguson (2012) states that if archives are “the places to put [important] documents and the regimes that would discipline them,” then not only is the US the “archival entity” (p. 19) *par excellence*, but the university is “the capitol of archival power, training state and economy in its methods of representation and regulation” (p. 27). Recognizing universities as archives then, it is important to pay attention to the statements of these institutions, including those made in an official capacity, as well as the more informal statements that appear normal and/or commonplace (Ahmed, 2012). In relation to leadership, this project recognizes the university as an institution that not only speaks with authority about leadership and how to develop it, but also a place that leadership becomes an institutionalized part of—seen as inherent and natural. Thus, this project considers the university (but also the people and materials within it), as an archive itself and as a discursive plane that circulates discourses of leadership. In the following, I discuss my conceptualization and use of the (my) archive, its materials, and strategies for analysis.

**The Spaces and Places of Leadership**

My interest in this project began when I started working in a Student Affairs office dedicated to increasing student involvement on campus from 2011-2014. During this time, I served in various roles including Leadership Coordinator, Student Organization Advisor, and Risk Management consultant, where I planned and facilitated leadership conferences, workshops, and other involvement opportunities for students. Treating the university as both a
text and a collection of texts, while working in these roles I amassed an archive comprised of both textual and experiential data to examine leadership discourse in the university. My approach to collecting materials reflected that of Sara Ahmed’s in her book *On Being Included* (2012), where she examined the ways in which diversity has (or has not) been institutionalized in higher education. Ahmed (2012) termed her method for collecting data as an “ethnography of texts,” explaining, “To ask what diversity does, we need to follow diversity around, which is to say, we need to follow the documents which give diversity a physical and institutional form” (p. 12). Hence, to read the university as its own archive requires that we approach it as a constantly moving force, and one that we as researchers must move with if we want to better map its various and simultaneous effects. This methodology works in conjunction with a queer theoretical frame that similarly demands “our attention can and should be mobile” (Bersani, 1990, p. 204). If we want to look for spaces of resignification, then our research methods must also be reformulated to orient our attention in alternative ways—sideways—and in mobile ways. Adopting Ahmed’s approach, I endeavored to ‘follow leadership around’ the university to gather data—seeing where it went or where it was not permitted to go, and to see who reserved the authority to be called a leader or to deem others as leaders.

As I followed leadership around the university and became more and more privy to the inner workings of higher education and leadership development as the Leadership Coordinator, I found that Student Affairs (SA) offices are one of the central units responsible for promoting and encouraging leadership discourse within the university. While not all SA offices are necessarily concerned with leadership, many do explicitly express an interest in (or are given the charge of) leadership development on campus (Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, & Arensdorf, 2006). This is arguably because of SA’s historical roots and underlying philosophy to nurture the
development of the ‘whole’ student beyond just academic training (American Council on Education & Williamson, 1949; Rentz, 1996). Although, *in loco parentis* technically ended in the early 1960s, SA has nevertheless consistently positioned itself as concerned with the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical facets of students. Indeed, this holistic approach to student development has been part of SA’s mission since its inception in the university. *The Student Personnel Point of View* which was originally published in 1937—one of the most influential publications of the profession at the time and still today—emphasized that the purpose of the SA professional is to develop a student “to the limits of his [sic] potentiality” and to see the student as a whole, encouraging “the development of the student as a person rather than upon his intellectual training alone” (American Council on Education & Williamson, 1949, p. 1). Hence, under the purview of the SA umbrella typically falls the ‘non-academic’ or ‘extracurricular’ services outside of the classroom, such as residence life, Greek affairs, career services, student involvement, community service and engagement, the Dean of Students office, disability/access centers, student conduct, multicultural services, and student recreation (Rentz, 1996).

However, if the SA mission is considered against the backdrop of the neoliberalization of the university, the particular practices or services offered to students appear less often to work to create informed and participating citizens of a community, and instead focus on job training or professional development. As an example, in 2017 an SA office at Freedom University planned a week to promote student involvement on campus, with each day themed as a certain skill employers would be looking for when hiring individuals, including communication, teamwork, and, of course, leadership. As discussed further in Chapter 4, rather than being seen as a place where informed, politically-engaged citizens are nurtured, under neoliberalism the American university is framed as “primarily valuable to human capital development, where human capital
is what the individual, the business world, and the state seek to enhance in order to maximize competitiveness” (Brown, 2015b, p. 176). Developing the ‘whole student’ then, comes to mean encouraging those entrepreneurially-inclined, technically skilled and concerned with acquiring knowledge exclusively for what it can contribute to their professional profile. As the university becomes seen as necessary in obtaining a promising career, academic content becomes seen as superfluous, while extracurricular activities provide ‘real world’ skills. Leadership, no surprise, is one such skill.

Importantly for this study, a common characteristic of SA offices is that rather than focusing on a special population or group (e.g., faculty or athletes) within the university, these offices typically create and implement leadership development programs with the ostensible goal of impacting the general student population—whatever that might mean for the specific institution. Accordingly, the popular trend to suggest everyone can be a leader and a one-size-fits-all approach to leadership development makes sense when their target audience is the general student, whereas other offices might be more restrictive in their definitions of leadership. Because such offices are focused on making their programs and services applicable to the majority of students, the leadership discourses and practices they implement I interpret as revealing of prevailing or popular ideologies and discourses of leadership. So although the focus on SA offices is an effort to provide a more nuanced account of leadership in the university, dominant discourses of leadership—those which are made to appear as common sense and applicable for all—can be gleaned from examining leadership practices in these offices.

Having been so involved in carrying out leadership development programming at the university-level, part of this research is based on analyzing personal experience and participant observations of the leadership trainings and workshops provided by SA offices, as well as
several meetings and informal interactions where leadership discourses circulated. However, as a methodological move then to theorize the “discursive, the material, and the ephemeral together” (Rodríguez, 2014, p. 25), this approach jumps not only between multiple sites of leadership but also multiple kinds of materials for mapping discourse. Contemporary leadership discourse is not merely a product of several books that have been written on the topic, but rather a discursive formation. Poststructural theory recognizes subjects as disciplined and constituted by not just one source, but by the pamphlet, the administrator, the program, the book, the classroom, and so on because power is productive, dispersed, and operates verbally, textually, and relationally across objects (Foucault, 1977). To examine leadership discourse, then, meant that I needed a variety of kinds of materials, from a myriad of sources, in order to garner a more holistic (though never complete) picture of how leadership discourse operates in the university. Thus, the leadership archive is a compendium of materials, including popular press books, scholarly articles, newspaper and magazine articles, university created pamphlets, advertisements, facilitation guides, conference and programmatic outlines/agendas, websites, and organizational reports that I collected during my time working in higher education.

**The Best Archivist is the Best Hoarder**

In a roundtable discussion with other archival researchers, Christina Hanhardt admits: “I have always had a queer relationship to the ‘archive’ insofar as I am a hoarder” (Marshall, Murphy, & Tortorici, 2015, p. 218). Hanhardt describes how the piles of fliers, notes, and other random materials accumulating on her floor over the years eventually led her to think about doing historical research for her first book (Marshall, Murphy, & Tortorici, 2015). Aligned with a hoarder-approach, I consider the wide array of documents circulating within the university to be important to my research, including materials that have been traditionally disregarded or seen
as unworthy of serious scholarly examination. Queer and feminist researchers (e.g., Halberstam, 2011; McRobbie, 2009) have argued that the maligned status of mundane materials or popular texts within the research community may in part stem from its association with consumer culture—a traditionally feminized sphere—and therefore suggest that it is not objective reasoning but rather patriarchal culture which leads such materials to be seen as undeserving of scholarly attention. For topics like leadership, this is especially important as often times the small pamphlets, brochures, toolkits, or popular press leadership texts with titles like Developing The Leader Within You (Maxwell, 1993) are disregarded or deemed insignificant by mainstream researchers. Yet, these are the materials that line the shelves of leadership libraries in student involvement offices, they are the books written by the keynote speakers at leadership conferences that are then handed out to the students, and they are the materials that SA administrators use in forming leadership programming and initiatives on campuses. Hence, in my following of leadership I remained open to not only how I gathered materials, but also to the very sources of data. I welcomed the ordinary and local materials, which I argue have influential and material effects on university life and leadership discourse. Some specific materials I draw heavily on in this study include: a facilitator manual for a pilot leadership development program (Chapter 4), a DiSC assessment staff profile and personal leadership report (Chapter 5), and a participant packet for the NEW Leadership Conference (Chapter 6).

While many of the study’s materials are site-specific (i.e. local leadership conferences, university pamphlets, etc.), many of the resources used by university offices are also mass-produced, popular, nationally distributed or organizationally sanctioned texts, such as popular leadership models or books. Some of the materials I analyze throughout the project include: Gallup’s Strengthsfinder assessment, and texts such as James Kouzes and Barry Posner’s (1989,
2007, 2012) *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, Sara King, David Altman, and Robert Lee’s (2011) *Discovering the Leader in You: How to Realize Your Leadership Potential*, and Sheryl Sandberg’s (2013) *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*. These are materials that people interested in leadership, both in and outside of the university, would most likely be familiar with and I read their high selling status as indicative of what the majority of those interested in leadership find to be attractive, marketable, useful, and/or respectable. As such, these materials are used as a window for analysis, through which I am able to argue that by focusing on the various ideologies, models, or theories that these books perpetuate and rely on, we are also able to then interrogate the broader construction and culture of leadership. Moreover, looking at popular or widely known data sources, I mobilize an opportunity to show the tensions between national discourses of leadership and how they may play out on local campuses.

**Shrinking the Archive**

Because leadership development has, in some form or another, saturated nearly every echelon of higher education institutions across the country, it was important that in constructing my archive I set some criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of materials. Because discourses are contextual, historical, and relational, the settings in which they are deployed shapes the kind of leadership ideology and practices carried out. For example, leadership workshops for presidents, deans, and administration might evoke narratives or professionalism and business ethics, while leadership trainings for student athletes conducted within athletics programs may emphasize discourses of teamwork and competition. As such, the materials and analyses in this project are limited by location as well as scope.
As for location, while I use the word ‘university’ to describe the institutional setting with which I am concerned, not all universities are the same—varying for instance from public to private, Liberal Arts colleges to Research I universities—nor do they use leadership discourse in precisely the same way. For example, Cookson and Persell’s (1985) ethnographic work discusses the ways in which elite boarding schools perceived their students as leaders upon their arrival on campus and thus engaged them in activities which only further crafted the skills they expected them to already possess. Hence, at elite universities like Harvard or Dartmouth, where students may be perceived as ‘already leaders,’ it can be expected that leadership discourse will look differently from that of a public or state school where students are perhaps expected to be in need of cultivating more skills and training. Thus, it is important to make clear that the majority of the materials in my personal archive, as well as the personal narratives and observations, come from a land-grant, Research I university, located in the Pacific Northwest of the US (affectionately called Freedom University)—the university at which I worked and had access to. Freedom University is located in a rural community, with over 20,000 undergraduate and graduate, majority white, middle-to-upper class students. Lastly, as a product of my geographic knowledge and location, this is a decidedly US-centric analysis focusing on the American/US university. However, because mainstream leadership is a dominant discourse that circulates in many Anglo, Western cultures, parallels can be drawn between the claims made here and leadership trends in the UK and Western Europe.

In terms of scope, because I am interested in the larger discourses of leadership which seek to develop the general student population, I narrowed my focus to mainly include materials from SA offices, or those which target all students, rather than specific kinds of individuals (e.g., athletes or administration). Along the same lines, because I sought leadership materials and
practices that target the individual student, I excluded materials that solely catered to groups or discussed Organizational Leadership. Within the university, this line of leadership theory typically targets student organizations or student government. With my attention on students, I also excluded leadership development materials that only targeted administration, faculty, or employees of the university, though there is some overlap.

**Disentangling the Archive**

In the same way that my theoretical framework, QFP, could be considered a form of “intellectual promiscuity” (Butler, 1990, p. x), my methods play the field. Drawing from the approaches of queer theory, feminist theory, and poststructuralism—each of which has its own methods and modes of inquiry—necessitates what Halberstam (1998) refers to as a “scavenger methodology” (p. 12). A scavenger methodology “refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” and uses multiple methods, particularly ones “often cast as being at odds with each other,” within a single examination (Halberstam, 1998, p. 12). In this dissertation, to disentangle my leadership archive I used several qualitative strategies of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), including: (a) description and interpretation of personal narratives and participant observation; (b) critical historiography of texts and contemporary practices; and (c) close and thematic readings of documents, field notes, and other archival materials.

**Approaches of CDA**

Examinations of ‘discourse’ are conducted across numerous academic disciplines, such as sociology, communication studies, linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy, and all conceptualize discourse in different ways (Mills, 1997). However, one distinction used to separate these perspectives regards whether or not they use a critical approach to discourse. Noncritical forms typically seek to understand how language works in both arrangement and
function (Gee, 2011). For example, conversational analyses of discourse “look for techniques of ‘saying’—how turns are taken in conversations,” which puts an emphasis on language as it is employed at a micro-level (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 31). These interpretations of discourse are often “resistant to making connections between such ‘micro’ structures of conversation and the ‘macro’ structures of social institutions and societies” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 9). While attention to semiotic elements remains important in critical approaches to discourse, critical discourse analysts examine discourse as not only the micro verbal exchanges between two parties, but as expressive of relationships of power at both the macro and micro levels, therefore constituting how we understand our realities and ourselves (Fairclough, 2001). As such, critical approaches to discourse do not view language as a benevolent abstraction, but as always already politically, historically and culturally contingent, and both symptomatic and productive of power relationships (e.g., Fairclough, 2001; Foucault, 1977; Suspitsyna, 2009).

For this project then, a poststructural CDA holds that discourses are “socially constitutive as well as socially shaped” and therefore attentive to the ways in which history, context, language, power, ideology, and subjectivity come together to not only reflect but also produce discourses (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2011, p. 358, original emphasis). CDA looks at each of these constitutive elements and attempts to disentangle their discursive formations and illuminate the particular realities or power relationships they express. However, CDA is not so much a single method of conducting research as it is an approach to research—or “rather a cluster of approaches” (Meyer, 2001, p. 23), encompassing a wide range of assumptions and interpretations. In this examination, CDA serves as a methodological anchor that informs the multiple strategies (detailed in the next section) I engage to examine leadership discourse in the university.
Personal narrative and observations. Personal narratives and observations in this dissertation serve as both data sources and a means of analysis. I take an active and prominent role throughout the qualitative investigation and a substantial part of my methods involved writing and re-telling some of my experiences working at Freedom University. Qualitative, but especially feminist, researchers (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1986; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Fine, 1994; Harding, 1987; hooks, 1989; Richardson, 2000) have made clear how crucial drawing on these personal accounts can be in order to provide more nuanced examinations of power, privilege, and difference, and to illuminate the role of the researcher in acquiring, interpreting, and producing research. The imperative to separate one’s self from the research produced, and assuming certain methods can create an objective distance between researchers and their objects of study, is a masculinist, colonialist fiction (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Fine; 1994). Alternatively, feminist qualitative methods argue that research and writing is always produced through the lens of the researcher. Involving my own narratives and observations throughout the research highlights my positionality as a white, able-bodied, bisexual, middle-class, cisgender woman and the ways in which my positionality influences my interpretation of the research. While in some studies the positionality statement is often only stated once early on in the writing and then the researcher is made a distant party throughout the rest of the writing, feminist methods require that researcher reflexivity be continually woven throughout the entire research process (Lather, 1993; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). As Butler (1990) suggests, it is an ethical and political act to unabashedly remind readers of research that “there is a person here” (p. xvii). Therefore, I continually try to incorporate myself throughout the analysis, be it through using first person voice, personal stories, or even small attempts at humor.
Importantly, this dissertation draws on personal narrative and observations not because these methods capture some ‘truer knowledge’ or essence of experience, but rather because it is through writing and reflecting on our experiences that we re-evaluate and understand how we ‘come to know’ (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The poststructural proposal that discourses shape our notions of ourselves and reality troubles the idea that any of our experiences are ever wholly unique or understood outside of discourse. As such, I use this mode of analysis so that I may reflect on my experiences not as illustrative of some special individual essence, but as a way to illuminate how multiple discourses have come to shape my understandings and interpretations of said experiences. This kind of self-reflexive auto-ethnographic practice is also appropriate for working through leadership discourse, as the current focus on self-development within leadership relies on technologies that actively shape and constitute our relationships with ourselves. Thus, I present my experiences not as indisputable facts, but as another window through which to peer into the daily practices and affective modes of leadership.

**Critical historiography.** The second method of analysis is critical historiography, which, as applied in this dissertation, is closely aligned with Michel Foucault’s (1984) genealogical method. Critical historiography challenges ahistoricity and illustrates the ways in which commonsense assumptions or things deemed a ‘normal’ part of society are actually produced over time through discursive formations. A critical historiography maps the ways in which multiple discourses have come to constitute objects and subjects given the conditions of possibility—the ways in which certain things have become thinkable and sayable—at a particular time. As an analytic tool, critical historical tracings do not just challenge the way we look at and recount history, but also reality, itself. In this way, it shows that “truth is made rather than found” (Rorty, 1989, p. 53), and that discourses and the perceptions of reality they constitute do
not exist in abstraction or come about naturally, but are *produced* and intertwined with power relationships.

A critical historiography is useful when looking at leadership, as we find various leadership theories from the past continue to reemerge in new or contemporary models and texts. The typical delineation of leadership history—recounting the move from the Great Man theories of leadership in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, to trait theories in 1930s and 40s, to the behavioral and contingency approaches of the 1950s and 60s, and so on—only perpetuates what Rost (1991) calls the “folklore of leadership” (p. 18). Such delineation suggests that leadership researchers have advanced their theories from one decade to the next, with the previous theory fading away as a new and improved one takes its place. On the contrary, Rost (1991) asserts, “[u]sing traits as an explanation of leadership in the 1980s is as popular as it was in the 1950s” (p. 19). Hence, although this method engages in tracing leadership theories and models historically, critical historiography seeks to highlight how the past and present are not separate entities but intertwined. This method is especially useful in analyzing the ways in which many leadership theories and models of the past continue to be repackaged and rebranded in contemporary neoliberal leadership discourse.

It is important to note that critical historiography is not intended to find the origins of leadership theory, but instead to use the past as a means to challenge present assumptions of leadership as naturally occurring, ahistorical, or even an unequivocal social and moral good. It is not dedicated to answering “how can we develop the best leaders?” but to question instead: When (and why) did developing ‘good leaders’ become so important to the university? To address this inquiry, this dissertation looks at specific past events and historical epochs, that while appearing unrelated, played a role in shaping the leadership discourses and practices we
see in the university today. Thus, a critical historiographical analysis illuminates leadership not as this autonomous, objectively studied, naturally occurring feature of our social structures and relationships, but as a discourse shaped by the historical context and relations of power in which it is situated. This project will use historical contextualization to analyze not only how leadership became a part of the university and SA offices, in particular, but also how the leadership models widely used and accepted came to be so popular by situating them in the contemporary neoliberal context.

**Close reading and thematic analysis.** Recognizing discourses are constituted by historical, cultural, and social processes, CDA draws careful connections between the historical development of discourses and circulating texts. A CDA sees texts as both reflective and productive of discourses and power relations within the specific context. Hence, as a third method, this dissertation paid attention to various textual materials through close, deconstructive, and thematic readings as part of mapping leadership discourse in the university. At times that involved more textually-oriented readings to look for common themes, with special attention to recurring topics, word usage, metaphors, logics, or the rationale that these texts deploy in the name of ‘good’ leadership. At other times, it involved examining these texts in connection to other texts (intertextuality) and to situate them in relation to broader political, cultural, and social agendas or discourses.

Examining discourses at both micro and macro levels, then, in part, includes paying attention to the linguistic elements and structures of a text. Critical analyses of discourse recognize the theoretical and material importance of language, seeing language as a potential site where power relations can be reified and produced but also potentially resisted or transformed. While ‘discourse’ and ‘language’ are not interchangeable, language, grammar,
semiotics, or talk (when contextualized) are vital components for analyzing the constitution of discourses (Fairclough, 2000; Fairclough et al., 2011; Suspitsyna, 2010). For example, Fairclough (2000) sees CDA as a “resource” against neoliberalism because it recognizes not only the part language “figures in hegemonic struggles,” but also how “struggles against neoliberalism can be partly pursued in language” (p. 148). Since this study is situated within a neoliberal context (which, in itself, is also a discursive formation), an attention to the language of neoliberalism—the words it uses, reconfigures, or avoids—is important to consider when closely reading any texts. Similarly, when looking historically, we can see that leadership, too, has been a language game where new terms and phrases come to replace outdated, politically incorrect, or outwardly authoritarian words with more ostensibly inclusive or benevolent language. This is especially true in relation to the 1970s split where ‘leadership’ came to replace ‘management’ broadly (explored in Chapter 4). Hence, some analysis will focus on the texts themselves, noting vocabulary, themes, or other aspects of language-in-use.

This is not to say, however, that one can just look at a text and instantly “read off” discourse or ideology, but rather that through a close reading—and one which connects that reading to historical and social contexts—analyses can be performed that map some of the interdiscursive and ideological relationships that undergird leadership texts (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 362). CDA interpretations of texts do not merely accept their words at face value, but rather it questions the “opacity” of texts and looks to the “discursive constructions or stories that are embedded in texts as information that is less readily available to consciousness” (Locke, 2004, p. 40). I do this by examining not only the denotative but also connotative meaning of texts; that is, the underlying, affective, ideological, or suggestive elements of the language used (Hall, 2007). Reading for connotative meanings allowed me to thematically map leadership
discourse, finding recurring or common patterns across texts. Connotative meanings are further deconstructed when examined in conjunction with historical tracings and contextualization, which looks to when statements began to occur with a regularity and with ‘scholarly’ or institutional backing. Connecting back to the earlier discussion on reflexivity of the research, it is important to note that no reading exists outside of discourses and our own personally socially-situated interpretations. It’s not as if themes ‘emerge’ out of nowhere or naturally but are instead selected by me, my lenses for analysis, and the various texts I selected in the first place.

Discussion and Conclusion

Qualitative methodologists recognize that drawing on different methods can provide “rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Historically contextualizing the various practices or purposes of leadership illustrates the ways in which various political, social, and cultural relationships have contributed to the dominant discourse we recognize as ‘leadership’ today. However, an exclusively historicist description of the emergence of leadership discourse cannot account for its contemporary political and social power alone. Qualitative and feminist methods have illustrated the importance of connecting broader, historical circumstances to the lived experiences of subjects (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Therefore, historical contextualization is useful when in combination with more micro-analyses like personal narrative, participant observation, and close readings to illustrate the ways in which our bodies and daily experiences are an "inscribed surface of events . . . totally imprinted by history" (Foucault, 1984, p. 83). At the same time, drawing on specific artifacts or personal narrative can work to not only illuminate, but to also possibly contest, larger historical or social accounts by recognizing subjects as more than “simply bearers of structures” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 21). Situating the greater historical picture and the quotidian in relationship
with one another, this approach provides a space from which to examine the tensions between the macro and micro, the personal and political, the local and national, and to compare and contrast my experience and observations with what is described in the leadership books, facilitation guides, and pamphlets. Thus, this dissertation—and the materials of the archive—uses multiple methods to create ways for examining both the big picture as well as the day-to-day subtleties of discourse by using all of the aforementioned methods in combination in my analysis, switching between them within each chapter, in order to map leadership discourses.

In this chapter I described the methodology used for this study and discussed how my ‘following’ of leadership assisted me in amassing a leadership archive that I then analyzed using several critical discourse analytic methods. By no means is my archive all-encompassing, constituting everything one needs in order to deconstruct leadership discourse or all the discursive practices it engenders in the university. However, the multi-method/multi-textual approach used in this project can provide some insight into the ways in which dominant discourse of leadership circulate and shape subjects. Moreover, the experiences, artifacts, and texts I examine at the university do not just report the current state of leadership practices at the university level, but actively construct leadership life. This project rejects the possibility of objective representation and instead maps leadership discourse in the university through analyzing multiple sources with the intent not to ‘solve’ the pitfalls of leadership development, but to advance rearticulations of leadership. In using these multiple approaches as a way to conceptualize leadership research and the relationships we study, alternative archives and subjectivities unaddressed by positivist approaches potentially come into view. With the overarching goal of deepening our understandings of leadership as a discourse, reading closely for emerging themes, contextualizing the artifacts, and tracing these texts to their sources
through critical historiography fosters the possibility for research that illuminates the discursive practices of leadership in the university.
In the summer of 2012, Freedom University launched a leadership development pilot program called the First Step Leadership Experience. Specifically targeting first year college students, according to the website, First Step was designed “to help [students] kick start their university careers” and to “inspire students to think of themselves as ‘crew not passengers’ as they . . . lay out a path for the next four years that encompasses their personal passions, visions and values.” As the Leadership Coordinator at the time, I was (un)lucky enough to be one of several Student Affair’s employees selected to facilitate this new, highly anticipated venture. The First Step program began with a two-day retreat including icebreakers, networking BBQs, and group activities that asked students to reflect on their personal values, commitments, and unique, individual contributions. In our facilitator’s manual it stated that students were to be brought to the retreat by their parents or guardians and then during a “ceremonial bridge crossing,” walk over and leave their family behind to symbolically “transition to [a] new life.” But First Step was more than a mere weekend program. Over the course of the 2012-2013 academic school year, the program required that students enroll in Freedom University’s leadership program, participate in one large-group activity per semester (an outdoor excursion, service project, etc.), attend at least one leadership workshop a month, and create an online e-portfolio to document their progress and launch their professional online presence. First Step
would grant students who completed all components of the program a leadership certificate said to “enhance any resume or application.”

Although leadership initiatives on university campuses can vary in approach due to student demographic or institutional mission, I open this chapter by describing First Step because many of the underlying facets of the program are not unique to Freedom University, but rather emblematic of several prevailing assumptions of contemporary leadership discourse, generally, and leadership development in higher education, specifically. First, the First Step program was based on the Social Change Model (SCM) of leadership, which, according to the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Development Programs (NCLP), is the most widely used leadership development model in higher education today. Importantly, the SCM was developed specifically for college students, guided by the belief that “Leadership is a process, not a position” and that “Leadership is inclusive and accessible to all people” (Cilente, 2009, p. 50). The popularity of the SCM—and the fact that it was created to be used expressly at the university-level—is indicative of a broader transformation in the conception of the ‘leader’ role from that of exclusively corporate CEOs or politicians to anyone willing to strive for leadership, including young, college-aged individuals with no title or formal leadership experience. Accordingly, the First Step website read: “Leadership is not reserved just for managers and organizational presidents. We all have the opportunity to influence others.” Thus, the First Step program and the SCM assume that leadership is non-positional and therefore accessible to all individuals, regardless of their title or background.

In order for such claims to make sense, the process of developing leadership is similarly refashioned. This brings us to the second notable assumption of contemporary leadership discourse: that the key to realizing one’s leadership potential is though self-development. No
longer automatically granted by position, leadership is now a choice. Individuals decide whether they want to develop themselves and cultivate the leader within. Both the SCM and First Step emphasize the necessity of self-development—be it self-exploration, self-reflection, and/or self-discipline. The First Step facilitator’s manual reads: “First Step is about personal leadership development. It asks participants to look inward and identify strengths and potential” (original emphasis). At the retreat, this focus on the self manifested in various small and large group activities, such as the Animal Matrix. After answering a series of multiple choice questions about themselves, students ‘discover’ which animal (i.e., Monkey, Lion, Golden Retriever, Owl) best represents their personality and then how to best work with animal types similar to, or different from, themselves. Importantly, such a concentration on the individual and personal leadership development is not a distinctive component of university leadership development programs, but rather symbolic of a burgeoning leadership development industry which assures everyone that given the ‘proper’ guidance (and money) that they, too, can be a leader.

In sum, First Step’s vision of leadership revolves centrally around two pledges: that 1) leadership is non-positional and accessible to anyone, and 2) that becoming a leader begins with the individual’s choice to engage in self-development. Taken together, these presuppositions underscore one of the most pervasive and prevailing discourses of leadership in higher education today: that everyone can be a leader. Indeed, mainstream leadership theory and practices propose that given enough training and self-development, all individuals can be leaders. While the traditional reaction of the field of Leadership Studies is to read this invitation as the product of new and emerging research on leader development, in this chapter I argue that the ‘everyone can be a leader’ model and its associated practices of leadership development within the university are both symptomatic and productive of the neoliberalization of leadership.
development and of the university. More than just an economic policy, neoliberal ideology has reshaped our understandings of the self and work, the purposes of the university, and the subject position of the ‘leader’ in market terms and with market aspirations. Specifically, in this chapter I map the emergence of the everyone-can-be-a-leader discourse as coextensive with the neoliberal context, particularly the neoliberal logics of individualization and responsibilization.

By individualization I mean the processes which promote the free, autonomous individual over collective, systemic considerations and therefore reinvigorate “a primitive form of individualism: an individualism which is ‘competitive,’ ‘possessive,’ and construed often in terms of the doctrine of ‘consumer sovereignty’” (Ong, 2006, p. 11). Responsibilization refers to “modern forms of government of the self where individuals are called upon to make choices about lifestyle, their bodies, their education and health at critical points in the lifecycle—birth, ‘starting school,’ ‘going to university,’ ‘first job,’ marriage, retirement” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 160). Importantly, under neoliberalism ‘choice’ operates as a process of transfer, where responsibility for one’s wellbeing moves from the State to the self-regulating market actor or subject. Together, individualization and responsibilization create the “primary link between government and government of the self,” where the eminent individual through the rhetoric of ‘risk’ and ‘choice’ becomes fully responsible for all their successes and failures (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 160). The logics of individualization and responsibilization create the conditions within which the everyone-can-be-a-leader discourse not only makes sense, but is seen as positive, inclusive, and progressive theory in leadership development. However, as will be argued here and in later chapters, these logics reflect and bolster the neoliberal imperative to reconstitute the rational competitive subject and elide the potential for a leadership rooted in collective action and politics.
In the following sections I look at the ways in which contemporary understandings of leadership are reflective and productive of neoliberalism, driven by the logics of individualization and responsibilization. I begin by tracing the emergence of ‘leadership’ as a distinct discourse from that of ‘management’ in the 1970s and 80s, releasing ‘leadership’ from the role and title restrictions that ‘management’ evoked. Imbued with the ability to be applied across people and contexts, I discuss how leadership served as a vehicle through which managerial discourse could be taken up as a personal endeavor, suitable for the entrepreneurialization of selfhood that neoliberalism engenders. In the next section I explore how leadership’s “universal appeal” (Northouse, 2007, p. 12) allowed it to emerge within a university that was undergoing its own neoliberal transformations at the time. If creating the responsibilized-entrepreneurial-consumer-citizen is the goal of the neoliberal reconstruction of schooling, then leadership development—tethered to the corporate model—serves as a fitting technology through which to further map and reinforce neoliberal market mentalities. Moving to the 1990s, in the sections that follow, I continue to map the popularity of leadership discourse both in and outside of academia. I look at how the ‘leadership industry’ propagated and advanced the self-making focus of leadership development, reflective of the makeover culture that neoliberal economic insecurity engenders. Alongside the multicultural and diversity discourses circulating in the late 1980s and 90s, leadership also broadened its scope to target historically marginalized groups—emblematic of neoliberal modes of co-option and identity politics. I finally explore how the focus on the self and the idea that leadership is an individual choice makes sense in a neoliberal culture that seeks to eliminate the welfare state through an intensified form of personal responsibility. I conclude by summarizing the chapter and setting the stage for the two analysis chapters to follow.
Making Leadership for Everybody

The contemporary promise that leadership can be learned by anyone and everyone, is illustrative of several shifts and transformations that the concept of leadership has undergone regarding its purpose, applicability, and definition. These shifts can be read as consistent with the neoliberalization of higher education, society, and leadership over the last 50 years. In the following sections, I examine the ways in which the proposal that everyone can be a leader, while ostensibly inclusive and free from the constraints of position, title, and even identity, is rather indicative of the neoliberal rearticulations of the self/individual, choice, responsibility, meritocracy, and diversity.

Management’s Identity Crisis

In the US and UK, modern discussions on the attributes of a leader began with Thomas Carlyle and his well-known ‘Great Man’ theories of leadership in the 1840s. He argued that leaders were born, not made, and that history was merely the succession of great male leaders and their individual actions. Carlyle’s theories were “irredeemably masculine, heroic, individualist and normative in orientation and nature” (Grint, 2011, p. 8). However, in the early 1900s industrialization increased the need for leaders to run huge operations, moving the model from being hero-centered to more systems- and process-oriented (Grint, 2011). The changing modes of production and organizations, demanded leaders yield “power over production” (Grint, 2011, p. 8). This model of the efficient and rational supervisor coincided with the introduction of Taylorism into the factory (e.g., Taylor, 1911). However, the results of the Hawthorne experiments in conjunction with the rise of Communism and Fascism in the 1920s and 30s prompted more normative or charismatic leadership styles to be seen as desirable in place of the previous rational and scientific models (e.g. Weber, 1947). Managers now needed to be likeable
and wield enough influence to control workers with minimal direct supervision. In the 1940s, the increasing involvement of the psychological sciences demanded that good leaders be concerned with the “emotional life of the factory” (Rose, 1999, p. 71) and the general well-being of the employee to decrease worker dropout and increase productivity. From the 1950s through the early 70s, the psychological sciences inspired organizational and academic attention to shift once again, this time from the mental and emotional regulation of the worker to that of the individual manager to create the self-actualized, well-trained, and democratic supervisor (Rose, 1999).

Prior to the neoliberal restructuring over the latter half of the 20th century, discourses of leadership were usually articulated through the rhetoric of ‘management,’ and the manager/leader title was often reserved solely for men in positions of authority: the shop-floor manager, the boss or supervisor. The insistence that ‘leadership’ should be recognized as something distinct from ‘management’ arose alongside an emerging disdain for American managerialism in the late 1970s and early 80s. Described as a period of “intense economic distress,” the 1970s encompassed a shifting globalized economy, dwindling corporate profits, an oil crisis, weakening elite class powers, a burgeoning welfare state, and political unrest catalyzed by rising social justice movements (Brown, 2015a; Khurana, 2007, p. 297). As people searched for the cause of such social and economic instability, corporate America and its managers came under immense criticism from both conservative and liberal parties, alike. While conservatives claimed that America’s waning global dominance was the result of managers having lost their masculine edge, more enlightened critics pointed to the patriarchal structure and greed of organizations and managers as the reason for the economic crises throughout the country (Kanter, 1977; Kellerman, 2012; Khurana, 2007).
There were even some who suggested removing the role of the manager altogether. Economists Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling proposed that rather than management, or even government, the US should rely solely on the market as the arbiter of social order—a position many neoliberal advocates had taken before (Khurana, 2007). Keynesian economics’ favoring of an involved government, mass production, regulated industries, the substantial taxation of the wealthy, and capacious welfare programs were blamed by neoliberals like Jensen and Meckling as the cause for the current crises that faced the nation (Steger & Roy, 2010). Instead, they insisted that “the establishment of democracy depends upon freemarket economics, and not the other way around” (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 54), and urged the US to put its faith solely in the market—unbiased, objective, and incapable of failing—in order to resolve the uncertainties and instabilities of the time. All that was required of managers now was that they assist the organization in meeting its fiscal goals and demands of the shareholders. Rather than conceptualizing managers as an intricate part of the workforce structure, they became devoid of any meaningful responsibility: merely “hired hands” circulating within the corporation to facilitate contracts and basic day-to-day operations (Khurana, 2007, p. 325). During this time—sometimes referred to as New Public Management—citizens became recast as ‘customers,’ satisfactory work performance was to be quantifiably measured for accuracy and accountability, and results-oriented management was the dominant assessor of success (Steger & Roy, 2010).

By the 1980s, the first wave of neoliberal economics was well underway in the US. Often referred to as ‘Reaganomics,’ expanding capitalistic opportunities globally through the deregulation of domestic markets, ensuring class powers remained through union busting and the deskilling of labor, and shifting public services and responsibilities from the state onto the individual or private firms was the dominant agenda (Brown, 2015a; Steger & Roy, 2010).
Reaganite political climate also ushered in well-funded campaigns opposing most social justice or Liberal agendas in an effort to return a supposedly now-feminized America back to its rugged, white masculine, cowboy roots and to ensure US dominance and economic stability. Further reassessments of managerialism along with rampant corporate downsizing at the time led to drastically reduced middle management positions, and business schools across the country endured widespread criticism of their teaching methods and management training (Khurana, 2007). Indeed, universities were said to have become too theoretical and soft. For example, Admiral Hyman G. Rickover (1981) of the Reagan administration claimed that the teaching of abstract techniques in management classes did their students a “disservice” (para. 3). Management skills were, Rickover (1981) argued, a “matter of experience, the proper attitude, and common sense—none of which can be taught in a classroom” (para. 5). Similarly, William J. Abernathy and Robert Hayes (1980) in their article “Managing Our Way to Economic Decline,” criticized management training for its reliance on methods over experience and insight and advocated for a return to “back to basics” (p. 141). Like Jensen and Meckling, “Hayes and Abernathy placed blame for America’s declining economic performance squarely on the shoulders of managers” and pointed to business schools as the foundation fostering such poor managerialism (Spector, 2016, p. 170). The negative view of managers mixed with a neoliberal ethos of rugged individualism contributed to low enrollment in business and management schools across universities (Khurana, 2007). Instead of management positions, students now sought careers that were not only profitable, but independent—where they had only to be responsible for themselves, such as investment banking, consulting, and entrepreneurial fields (Khurana, 2007).
Management and leadership are different! Fearing the we had become a country that was “overmanaged” and “underled,” the definitive opinion of the late 1970s and 1980s was that ‘management’ was antiquated at best and superfluous at worst (Khurana, 2007, p. 355). In response, scholarship emphasizing ‘leadership’ as a process distinct from, and superior to, ‘management’ proliferated, and became the prevailing fashion within the leadership studies of the time (see Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 1990; Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991; Spector, 2016; Zaleznik, 1977). While prior theories of management usually assumed leadership was always a part of management and the terms were often used interchangeably, two professors, Abraham Zaleznik and John Kotter, diverted the discussion to emphasize the sharp distinctions between the two. In his article, “Managers and Leaders: Are They Different?,” Harvard Business School professor Abraham Zaleznik (1977) argued that managers were simply reactive, existing only to solve problems and maintain order. Leaders, on the other hand, were to disrupt the mundane operations and provide new perspectives to enduring issues. “Where managers act to limit choices, leaders develop fresh approaches to long-standing problems and open issues to new options” (Zaleznik, 1977, p. 4). Drawing on Max Weber’s theory of Ideal Types, Zaleznik (1977) felt that the differences between managers and leaders existed because these were two distinct kinds of people, arguing that they acted and thought differently from one another. Zaleznik’s (1977) characterization of leadership resuscitated the image of the charismatic leader—an individualistic understanding of leadership fitting for the economic environment of the 1980s. The rise of investor capitalism and entrepreneurialism that neoliberalism engendered made the individual, heroic leader—or in this case, corporate charmer, such as Chrysler’s CEO Lee Iacocca—desirable once again (Spector, 2016). Similar renderings of leaders as heroic and
charismatic can still be seen today in the ascension of superstar CEOs such as Steve Jobs or Elon Musk.

Like Zaleznik, John Kotter’s work on the difference between leadership and management also became pivotal in the Leadership Studies community. Kotter began his comparison in his 1988 book, *The Leadership Factor*, where he claimed that leaders were necessary to the success of an organization, bringing with them a vision and the ability to inspire others toward accomplishing company goals. Although focused on the differences between leaders and managers, unlike Zaleznik whose “condemnation” of managers was clear, Kotter argued that both were needed within a functioning organization (Spector, 2016, p. 167). Nevertheless, in his next book, *A Force for Change* (1990), Kotter made explicit his differentiation between leadership and management, developing a chart, even, that delineated the two. Per the chart, managers are responsible for “planning and budgeting,” “providing policy and procedures,” “monitoring results,” and “producing a degree of predictability” (Kotter, 1990, p. 6). Leaders, in contrast, are important for “developing a vision of the future,” “aligning people,” “motivating and inspiring,” and “producing change, often to a dramatic degree” (Kotter, 1990, p. 6). Overall, he maintained that while managers upheld the status quo, leaders inspired “adaptive change” (Kotter, 1990, p. 5).

Zaleznik and Kotter’s research on the difference between leadership and management represented a crucial turning point in leadership discourse. Summarizing the literature, Keith Grint (2010) stated that the split between leaders and managers is essentially that “management is the equivalent of *déjà vu* (seen this before), whereas leadership is the equivalent of *vu jàdé* (never seen this before)” (p. 15). Over the course of the 1980s, in both academic writing and popular culture, leadership was constructed as something not only distinct from, but better than,
management—understood to be more edgy, visionary, egalitarian, and inspiring. Several of the most iconic books on leadership were published at the time, including Burton Nanus and Warren G. Bennis’ (1985) *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge*, Tom Peters and Nancy Austin’s (1985) *A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference*, and the first edition of James M. Kouzes and Barry Posner’s (1987) *The Leadership Challenge* (now in its 6th edition). Over the last 40 years, the popularity of leadership over management has endured. Businesses have dramatically increased their investments in ‘leadership’ trainings, spending about 10 billion dollars a year on leadership development in the mid-1980s, to over 45 billion dollars only a decade later (Fulmer, 1997; Gomez, 2007). In 2012, alone, businesses and corporations, large and small, spent more than 14 billion dollars on leadership development materials and training (Gurdjian, Halbeisen, & Lane, 2014). Seen as imperative to company growth and success, this spending increased by 14% only one year later and there is no indication that this level of spending will cease soon (Bersin, 2014). In fact, in a recent report, leadership development was ranked by two-thirds of over 500 managers and executives surveyed as their top “critical human-capital priorit[y]” (Ray et al., 2012, p. 9). The imperative to develop leaders, it seems, is as pressing today as it was in the 1980s: “Becoming a manager, even an excellent manager, was no longer sufficient. The goal now was to become a leader” (Spector, 2016 p. 153).

**But are they different?** While efforts to make leadership one thing and management another is still a persistent theme in current popular press texts and leadership development programs, most contemporary academics concede that leadership and management are not drastically different, with each involved in the process of the other (Northouse, 2007; Spector, 2016; Yukl, 2013). In fact, some scholars point to the absurdity of any current efforts to differentiate between the two. Critically analyzing a recent chart made by David Stanley (2006)
which lists supposed characteristic differences between management and leadership, Bert Spector (2016) commented:

Leaders ‘take the blame’ while managers ‘blame others.’ Really? One distinction is a mere tautology: managers ‘manage work or people’ and leaders ‘lead people.’ It’s the final row of the list—‘relationship to organization’—that is most revealing. Managers may be ‘necessary’ to the organization, but leaders are ‘essential.’ Aren’t those words, necessary and essential, synonyms? (p. 153-154)

Spector’s point is well taken. When surveying the leadership/management literature a common language is apparent and often the same models and practices of management are still largely employed, only now under the new terminology of ‘leadership’ (Spector, 2016). For example, in 1964, Robert Blake created ‘the managerial grid’ which was a model detailing different management styles. Blake described managers as having concern for both people and production and saw leadership as a “team effort by managers working together” (Spector, 2016, p. 168). In 1991 Blake and Anne McCanse republished ‘the managerial grid’ only this time under the name ‘the leadership grid.’ Although the purpose of the grid was redrafted to emphasize “visionary leadership at the top,” the “grid remained exactly the same” (Spector, 2016, p. 168). In this way, leadership can be considered a bit of a misnomer, or even a “nostrum,” according to Rakesh Khurana (2007, p. 352). So while corporate executives exert ‘influence’ instead of ‘control,’ and they suggest ‘budget reallocations’ rather than ‘budget cuts’ which require ‘downsizing’ instead of ‘firing,’ we now find ‘leadership’ instead of ‘management’ used broadly.

But in the neoliberal moment such language games should not be dismissed without further consideration. As Norman Fairclough (2000) reminds us “the project of the new [neoliberal] world order is partly a language project,” introducing, reshaping, and recasting particular discourses and genres in its process of ascension (p. 147). For example, Fairclough (2000) presents the uses of ‘flexibility’ as a discourse rearticulated under neoliberalism. While it
can be understood as providing workers with greater autonomy, agency, and the freedom to choose when and how to work:

the ‘other’ of ‘flexibility’ is what we might call a discourse of ‘insecurity’ which represents social life in terms of insecurity, risk, anxiety, etc. Both however construct social problems as problems for individuals (‘flexibility’ as an individual virtue, . . . ‘insecurity’ as an individual problem). (Fairclough, 2000, p. 148)

The double function of ‘flexibility’ and its relationship to ‘insecurity’ is telling of the ways in which language games—the words used, reconfigured, or avoided—figures into the neoliberal project. What are the consequences when—to borrow from Foucault—the conditions of possibility give way to the disbursement of managerial discourse under the rhetoric of leadership? Recognizing that the two discourses are entangled, why might cultivating leadership over management be the priority under neoliberalism? And what functions might the non-positional, interdisciplinarity of leadership—making it applicable across all bodies and contexts—serve in the neoliberal moment?

**The entrepreneurial citizen-leader.** As discussed in Chapter 2, discourses are entangled with the government and production of subjectivity—“the ways in which human beings are constituted as subjects, through structures of language and power” (Read, 2011, p. 114). The era deemed New Public Management in the 1980s operationalized a neoliberal mode of governance for not only public servants—encouraging a decentralized, market-oriented, and enterprising form of government—but also discourses which constituted new modes of self-hood and identity aligned with the same values (Steger & Roy, 2010). As an extension of the liberal notion of the autonomous, free individual, under neoliberalism the further progression of privatization and minimal government involvement manifested in a new entrepreneurial, consumer citizen. In his lectures at *Collège de France*, Foucault (2008) described this emerging neoliberal subjectivity through the figure of *homo economicus*—originally theorized by Adam
Smith. Homo economicus is the economic subject who is economically rational, entrepreneurial, competitive, and above all else, self-interested (Read, 2009). Aligned with homo economicus, the individual is compelled to approach their ‘growth’ as an economic cost/benefit relationship where all behaviors, actions, and choices are performed in the name of crafting their human capital. Subjects are to invest in themselves through more schooling to obtain degrees, through various bodily surgeries to maintain an attractive appearance, and through life coaching, self-help guides, or customized workshops on a range of personal development topics in order to remain qualified in the competitive work climate. As Foucault (2008) states: “Homo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself” (p. 226).

However, while the discourses of New Public Management and neoliberal ideology advocate for the free, rational, self-interested individual, redefinitions of work and labor ensured that such agency would be redirected back to the market. That the individual would seek not to maximize themselves according to any guidelines or seek to achieve forms of success according to their own definitions, but that individual would align themselves, their goals, and their success with that of the goals and mission of the company or organization. While the notion of a strong ‘work ethic’ has always been in some sense an individualizing discourse, neoliberalism further advanced the project of enmeshing individuals’ work identities with their ‘personal’ ones (Weeks, 2011). Individuals are not to think about work as a means to a paycheck but rather as a place for personal fulfillment. In order to “produce themselves in work” (Rose, 1999, p. 116), individuals were encouraged to align their identities with that of the organization’s, simultaneously situating one’s contribution to the economy as a moral obligation.

In part, the widespread adoption of leadership signaled the (re)emergence of homo economicus and the conflation of work/life under neoliberalism (explored further in Chapter 5).
‘Leadership’ became a central way of “combining people and production” (Wren, 2005, p. 336), but doing so in a way that assuaged the common concerns evoked by the word ‘management. Indeed, while managers served to regulate others, leadership was about self-regulation. And as managers of themselves, the self-directed, self-monitoring subject embraced the market values of neoliberalism under the rhetoric of ‘freedom,’ ‘choice,’ and ‘personal autonomy.’ The imperative to take on this entrepreneurial identity—to consider oneself a leader—can be seen in the extreme with the conceptualization of oneself as a brand. In 1997 Tom Peter’s published a piece titled “The Brand Called You” where he explained, “Everyone has a chance to learn, improve, and build up their skills. Everyone has a chance to be a brand worthy of remark” (para. 8). In this sense, leadership discourse promotes the idea of the self as a commodity and reifies the notion that to ‘work’ on one’s self is the only means by which to ensure success both personally and professionally within a neoliberal context. As Rose (1999) declared: “The entrepreneur, it seems, was actually quite like us: we could all be entrepreneurially successful, we could all learn to be self-realizing, if we learned the skills of self-presentation, self-direction and self-management” (p. 117).

Disbursed through the discourse of leadership then, managerial modes of hierarchy, productivity, hyper-individualism, and efficiency were embraced as personal goals, rather than organizational responsibilities. Crucial to this process was to disentangle leadership from titles and the business context—to individualize and personalize managerialism à la leadership. In other words, the ‘split’ of leadership from management as a non-positional, more inclusive discourse fits with the neoliberal imperative to disburse managerial (re: market-centered) logic to encompass all aspects of life in ways that outwardly appear less corporate. As a result, ‘leadership’ adopted the guise of a subject position that could include all kinds of people,
regardless of position or identity while remaining discursively linked with the discourses of capitalism, masculinity, whiteness, and individualism that ‘management’ evoked. Leaders were now everyone among us. By the 1990s, leadership was widely understood as a non-positional, inclusive, and practical pursuit across a variety of contexts that everyone could achieve should they choose to do so. Leadership development programs and materials were created for churches, youth centers, the military, community services, and most importantly for this examination, the institution of higher education (Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011). As will be explored in the next section, the neoliberal restructuring of higher education—ramping up in the late 1970s and 80s and carried through to today as the modus operandi—allowed for the seamless embrace of leadership discourse in the university.

**Partners in Crime: Making Student Leaders in the Neoliberal University**

While developing students into leaders has always been (in some capacity) an implicit aim of the American university, prior to the 21st century, notions of leadership were primarily expressed through the rhetoric of citizenship and professionalism (Cohen, 1998). Not until the neoliberal restructuring of the late 1970s through the early 90s—both inside and outside of academia—did the pervasive imperative to develop ‘leadership’ and ‘leaders’ within the university become explicit. Indeed, leadership development flourished alongside the economic reinterpretations and neoliberalization of the American university. During the neoliberal restructuring of the late 1970s and 80s, most institutions including healthcare, prisons, churches, and the education system came to operate like businesses, and often on behalf of private businesses and corporations (Peters, 2001). Although higher education had already undergone some changes after the Cold War to align its purpose with economic aims, pressures for the US to remain dominant and competitive in the emerging global market of the time engendered a new
interest in education as a “basis for future economic growth” and initiated a “redesigning [of] the system so that it meets the needs of business and industry” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 171). Universities were encouraged to shift their attention away from social or cultural impacts, to one of economic ends—the precursor for what scholars cite as the corporatization of the university (see Besley & Peters, 2007; Bousquet, 2008; Melamed, 2011; Suspitsyna, 2009).

Called “one of the great casualties of neoliberalism’s ascendance in the Euro-Atlantic world,” the university is now, like everything else, a business (Brown, 2015b, p. 175). Operating under the assumption that what works in the private sector will also work in the public sector, the neoliberal university has restructured everything from its spaces (Ferguson, 2012; Talburt, 2010), to departmental and faculty organization (Darder, 2012), to the very purposes of higher education (Aronowitz, 2000; Bousquet, 2008; Giroux 2011). More concerned with their future value than immediate profit, universities are now consumed by their World Report or US News Rankings and try to surpass their competition by building bigger and better sports stadiums, recreation centers, and campus amenities. While Texas A&M touts a lazy river at one of their residence halls, you can find an on-campus ski resort at Michigan Technological University, Lobster dinners are available every night at Virginia Tech’s dining centers, and high-rise luxury condos are offered in place of residence halls at Boston University. Universities have also elected to outsource a majority of their operations to large corporations. Not only are private franchises, such as Subway and Barnes & Nobel, incorporated into university buildings, but faculty positions have been literally renamed in honor of donating corporations. There is a Taco Bell Distinguished Professor at Washington State University, a Yahoo! Chair of Information-systems Technology at Stanford University, and a Lego Professorship of Learning Research at Massachusetts. "Regardless of the intentions when the deals are inked [between corporations
The naming of faculty positions for corporate representation is only part of the staffing reorganization in the neoliberal university. While tenure track positions (those which provide job security and benefits) have decreased significantly, they are rapidly replaced by adjunct and contingent faculty positions (those which cost less and provide little to no benefits) (Bousquet, 2008). On the other hand, over the past 40 years, while faculty jobs have only increased around 50%, the number of administrative and staff positions has increased by 85% and 240%, respectively (Ginsberg, 2011, p. 25). The rising tide of administration over the last few decades is important to understanding the spread of leadership discourse in the university. Rising in numbers in the 1980s, administrators developed a culture of their own, creating a cohesive unit on campus that often positioned itself in opposition to the academic faculty—an opposition still palpable today (Bousquet, 2008). As these individuals grew in size and responsibility, they brought with them MBA degrees, and by extension, managerial discourse (Ginsberg, 2011). In fact, as described by Marc Bousquet (2008) the administration at the time felt they themselves were the creators of campus culture and gladly adopted the language of management theory but under the rhetoric of “educational leadership,” deeming themselves “institutional leaders” (Bousquet, 2008, p. 12)—reflective of the turn away from management in language but not ideology, as described in the previous section. Administrators saw organizational culture “as the wellspring of all possibilities” and the means through which to “accelerate change, reduce
opposition, and sweepingly create in individuals the desire to change themselves to greater conformity with the institutional mission” (Bousquet, 2008, p. 12).

Now in the 21st century, the administrative branch of Student Affairs (SA)—those that deal in student involvement, Greek life, recreation and health centers, housing and dining services, community and volunteer programming, and diversity programming—spearheads leadership development programming in the university. Seen as both on-campus leaders, themselves, and responsible for the development of student leaders, the imperative of contemporary leadership development in SA is clear. In 2010, the College Student Educators International (ACPA) and the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) released its joint document entitled *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners* (2010), which included ‘leadership’ as one of 10 competency areas that those working in SA are “expected to demonstrate” (p. 4). Similarly, in *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession* (2003), now in its fourth edition by Komives and Woodard et al., ‘leadership’ is listed as one of nine central competencies and techniques for SA professionals. NASPA also currently publishes a magazine titled *Leadership Exchange*, which “delivers expert news and analysis on the latest trends in student affairs, insider perspectives from leaders in higher education and management, and tips and tools for managing diverse staffs and an ever-expanding set of responsibilities” (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, n.d.).

Hence, coextensive with the early neoliberal restructuring of higher education and the university was the professionalization of leadership education. The first book on student leadership programs, *Student Leadership Programs in Higher Education*, was published by Dennis C. Roberts in 1981. Organizations that primarily worked with corporations or in the private sector, such as the Center for Creative Leadership, began on-campus partnerships with
leadership centers and SA administrators (Komives, 2011). In the late 80s, the Association of Leadership Educators (ALE) was founded, and the University of Maryland formed the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs (NCLP), a primary source for leadership development educators to find resources and connect with other leadership professionals. University business schools still reeling from the criticism and resulting low enrollment in the 1980s played into the ‘distinction’ between leadership and management as well and moved away from traditional management classes, replacing them with the concept of leadership as a way to reestablish their value and credibility (Khurana, 2007). Many elite university business schools such as Harvard, Dartmouth, and Stanford also changed their mission statements, dropping ‘management’ and adding ‘leadership’ within their purview (Khurana, 2007). Non-elite universities followed suit, and during this time the first Leadership Studies doctoral program was established at the University of San Diego (Khurana, 2007). Framed as a more modern and egalitarian practice, business schools (but also corporate America) found a “renewed definition of purpose” in ‘leadership’ (Khurana, 2007, p. 354).

In departments across the university and beyond business schools, leadership discourse has been adopted by faculty and students with relative ease. Again, while management theory was seen as restricted to business contexts, leadership was now conceptualized as applicable to all aspects of one's life, and thus spread across academic departments and SA offices on campus with the broadest audience: the ‘general’ student population. With the neoliberal conceptualization of the individual as free, enterprising, and competitive, expanding leadership discourse made sense in an institution framed as an ‘investment’ said to provide students with the social and cultural capital that ensures economic success. Students are to approach their ‘college careers’ in a way that maximizes their return on investment. It is the expectation that
they will graduate as not merely a worker, but also a manager, a leader, trained to orchestrate themselves and others in the corporate world.

Indeed, the very purposes and functions of the university shifted in the neoliberal era from one of a social good, creating democratic citizens and engaged members of society, to one that seeks to generate productive self-governing workers and entrepreneurial citizens to participate in the economy. “The purpose of education in a neoliberal age is to produce producers” (Deresiewicz, 2015, p. 2). For many students, this has meant a shift in attention away from degrees in the liberal arts and toward ones in STEM, and from traditional academics in general and toward extracurricular activities, to provide “real world” skills more oriented toward future employment and entrepreneurial ventures (Deresiewicz, 2015). And amongst those extracurriculars aimed at preparing students for employment are leadership development programs. When describing why leadership development is important for students, the First Step website asserts: “Employers are looking for applicants who are able to navigate and lead teams, successfully communicate with a diverse group of customers and colleagues, as well as deal with difficult people.” With a neoliberal restructuring of the workforce where competition, downsizing, and outsourcing are the new norm, developing leadership capabilities is framed as a necessary vigilance against ensuing economic insecurity. Under this mentality, leadership skills have been framed within the university as one of the ways to appear more desirable and employable on the job market—thought to provide students with the qualifications and life-skills beyond what “non-leaders” might obtain.

More aligned than management with ostensible values of the democratic institution of education, leadership discourse quickly became a buzzword found in the mission statements and emphasized in university presidential addresses from the 1990s and well into the 21st century. In
fact, in the 1990s, the U.S. Department of Education even funded grants for any department to assist in the creation of programs specifically to improve student leadership development at the university-level during this time (Komives & Wagner, 2009). Students can now choose to major in Leadership Studies or opt for extracurricular opportunities like First Step to craft their leadership skills. The assumptions behind funding such programming presume that “leadership is a skill of some sort, which everyone should aspire to acquire . . . [and] that leadership can be learned quickly and easily—over a period of months or weeks or even a weekend” (Kellerman, 2012, p. 53). All that was needed was the right attitude, and every student could be a leader.

‘It’s a mindset:’ Creating an Industry through Creating the Self

While some universities have cashed in on leadership’s popularity by offering costly leadership training courses and modules, many administrative and Student Affairs offices have come to rely on materials and ‘expertise’ produced outside of the university as resources for creating new and innovative leadership development programming (Guthrie et al., 2013, p. vii). A billion dollar a year ‘leadership industry’ exists to meet this demand, promising to transform each and every employee, student, teacher, coach—the list could go on—into a ‘good’ leader (Kellerman, 2012). Accordingly, leadership development materials have increased in abundance since the late 20th century, constituted by “countless leadership centers, institutes, programs, seminars, workshops, experiences, trainers, books, blogs, articles, websites, webinars, videos, conferences, consultants, and coaches claiming to teach people—usually for money—how to lead” (Kellerman, 2012, p. xiii). While in the 1980s, an article on leadership was published almost once a day, that number doubled by the 1990s as leadership discourse rose in popularity (Ford & Harding, 2007). By the 2000s, a cursory search on Amazon for books on ‘leadership’ in 2003 revealed 14,139 results, that number more than tripled to 53,121 in 2010, and reached
134,839 results by 2015 (Grint, 2010). Popular press leadership texts such as *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989) and *Strengths Based Leadership* (Rath & Conchie, 2008) have each sold over a million copies. Some leadership books have even been created that specifically target college students, such as Susan Komives and Wendy Wagner’s *Leadership for a Better World* (2012), Barry Posner and James Kouzes’ (2014) *The Student Leadership Challenge*, and Marcy Levy Shankman and Scott J. Allen’s (2008) *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Guide for College Students*. According to Komives (2011), there now exists a “student leadership industry” too, with “contributions from publishers, consultants, professional speakers, and private companies that sponsor student leadership institutes, assessment measures, and training institutes” (p. 3). The underlying assumption of the industry is that by simply reading *these* books, adopting *those* particular behaviors and skills, or through completing specific trainings and workshops, everyone can, and indeed should, endeavor to become a leader.

In order to make leadership ‘sell,’ the industry moved away from Great Man theories of leadership or trait-based models which could only guarantee that those genetically-verified or in positions of power would purchase their materials. By promoting the idea that leadership was not restricted by position, identity, or experience the industry had widened its market. However, in order to fulfill the promise that everyone can be a leader, the leadership industry had to make a turn inward—to cultivate and advance a definition of leadership as an individual practice that anyone can develop given the appropriate training. In this vein, contemporary theories of leadership situated *self*-development as a primary strategy through which to develop leadership capabilities. In fact, the NCLP (n.d.), as an authority of leadership development education, insists that any leadership training makes self-development a primary focus: “NCLP believes that leadership education, training, and development should focus on expanding a student's inner
knowledge of oneself and one's relations with others, enabling them to engage in the leadership process in various contexts” (para. 2). As a result, leadership texts and programs often incorporate the theories and methods of psychology to inform leadership development. Leadership texts now resemble covert forms of self-help, with diagnostic tools, reflective journaling, stories of individual’s successes and failures, and titles like *Discover the Leader in You!*

The involvement of the psychological sciences in leadership is not necessarily new, but rather emerged in the 1930s and 40s with the Hawthorne Experiments and Human Relations movement in the US and UK, respectively. However, the conflation of self-making and leadership propagated in mainstream texts today reflects specific neoliberal forms of self-governance and personal responsibility. As psychological techniques situate self-work as the crux of leadership development, discourses which declare leadership as a matter of ‘influence,’ a ‘mindset,’ or ‘self-work’ emerge as the latest leadership fashion. ‘Influence’ was a dominant theme of the leadership literature in the 1990s. Leadership icon John Maxwell (1998) is often cited for stating: “Leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less” (p. 16). Maybe you are a teacher, maybe you are an aunt, a parent, a salesclerk. The position no longer mattered; if you interacted with others on a daily basis and had some impact on their decisions or behaviors, you, too, were a leader. In a more recent publication this concept is further advanced by Fredrik Arnander’s (2013) insistence that leadership is merely a mindset in his aptly titled book, *We Are All Leaders: Leadership is Not a Position, It's a Mindset*. Different from what Arnander (2013) considered “formal leaders”—those who have a formal title or a role of authority with certain responsibilities—“mindset leaders” can be anyone (p. X). Arnander (2013) explains, “it is a mindset that is open to anyone who cares to adopt it, regardless of place, industry, job, situation
or other circumstances. The only obstacle is really yourself” (p. 5). In Bill George’s (2007) *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership*, leadership is also a matter of choice and responsibility. George (2007) asserts: “First you will have to understand yourself, because the hardest person you will ever have to lead is yourself. Second, to be an effective leader, you must take responsibility for your own development” (p. xxxiii). Within popular press leadership texts, the ties between working on yourself and becoming a ‘good’ leader are clear. While managers needed a title and people to boss around, leaders only needed themselves and the right attitude.

The shape and profitability of the Leadership Industry (Kellerman, 2012) both in and outside of academia is not surprising given the neoliberal context within which it thrives, particularly the emergence of makeover culture in the 1990s. The emphasis on choice and personal responsibility is indicative of the neoliberal context that seeks to move from a “culture of dependency,” based on social welfare programs, to one of “self-reliance” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 155). In the 1990s, the Clinton administration oversaw the largest welfare reform in the 20th century. Clinton’s 1996 Welfare Reform Act—the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PROWRA)—required individuals to work in order to receive government support. Such an act operated under the logic that individual responsibility is more sustainable and fair than government assistance. Hence, the focus on the self in leadership is emblematic of the neoliberal ethos that encourages individual makeovers over systemic cultural critique. The decrease in social welfare services, wages, and benefits, with a simultaneous increase in the prevalence of contingent, sector-service jobs, and corporate ‘downsizing’ during the neoliberal restructuring of the late 1980s and 90s offered an unstable job market for many American citizens and workers. To handle the various economic and emotional insecurities of the neoliberal landscape “individuals have been advised not only to work longer and harder but
to also invest in themselves, manage themselves, and continually improve themselves” to survive (McGee, 2005, p. 12). However, as Micki McGee (2005) argues, it is not enough to be employed; rather individuals are compelled to remain consistently employable and marketable. With the ever-precarious economic climate of neoliberalism, an environment is created “in which constant self-improvement is suggested as the only reliable insurance against economic insecurity” (McGee, 2005, p. 13). More than just a pursuit of self-development to enhance job success, in a neoliberal context the self, itself, becomes a job. Leadership development training, books, or programs became part of the complex web of technologies said to ensure economic security and success—the promotion to that leadership position if the person is dedicated enough to capitalize on any available leadership training.

However, what also occurs under the narratives of personal empowerment and self-making is a responsibilization process where one not only “learns the fiduciary art of restyling the self through various forms of personal investment” but that these “are necessary both as a safeguard against risk but also as the preconditions for participation in the competitive society” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 142, author’s emphasis). Aligned with homo economics, the individual is reconceptualized as a “utility maximizer, a free and contractual individual, who is self-constituted through the market choices and investment decisions that he/she makes” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 18). Hence, any and all responsibility for peoples and communities is shifted off the state and onto the individual through the rhetoric of choice, risk, and insurance. However, the individual is not free to necessarily make any choice but instead the responsible self is to make the right life choices, as “the modern self thus enters a network of obligations” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 56). There becomes certain moral and responsibilizing aspects to not only the idea that we must make choices, but that the choices we make are prudent. In this way,
‘choice’ in neoliberalism “assumes a much wider role: it is not simply ‘consumer sovereignty’ but rather a moralisation and responsibilization—a transfer of responsibility from State to the individual in the social market” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 160, emphasis theirs). Choice becomes an illusion as predetermined paths are outlined as correct, smart, or responsible.

For students, this takes a particular form. As discussed earlier, higher education is conceptualized as an investment and in order for students to receive the largest return on their investment they are hailed to engage in the very self-making practices that are said to provide success given the unstable job market. In the university, individuals are to make the choice to take ‘full advantage’ of their college experience by becoming involved on campus and by developing their leadership skills and experience. Becoming a leader is the right choice, framed as undoubtedly smart and one leading to a promising career. The imperative to find fulfillment in work and to rely on outside expertise to help guide one’s life course makes leadership discourse the perfect vehicle through which to connect the personal to the professional, the market to the self.

**Bootstrapping Leadership**

The social movements of the 1960s and 70s brought increased calls for diversity and discussions of equality and multiculturalism to the forefront of corporate and American politics in the 1990s and 2000s. The changing context in conjunction with a focus on self-development in the leadership discourse created an opportunity for the burgeoning leadership industry to expand its market to include identities which have been historically excluded in management/leadership discourse. Over the past several decades the leadership industry has flooded the market with a large number of leadership materials targeting traditionally marginalized groups, especially women and/or women of color. Popular titles include:

Such ostensibly inclusive leadership practices were reflective of not only the social movements of the 1960s and 70s, but also the changing political climate of the 1990s and early 2000s—a time considered to be the “second-wave” of neoliberalism (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 50). The administrations of Bill Clinton (US) and Tony Blair (UK) at the time sought to find a separation from the neoconservative, brutish governmental tactics of Thatcher and Reagan which advocated for increased military spending, tax cuts, and antiquated platforms that promoted
family and eschewed multiculturalism. Rather, the US of the 1990s and new millennium saw a modernized, socially-moderate government that encouraged diversity and equality practices while nevertheless remaining a staunch defender of the free market (Steger & Roy, 2010).

Neoliberalism “presents the creation of globally integrating markets as a rational process that furthers individual freedom and material progress in the world” (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 53). Indeed, ‘globalization’ was the buzzword of the time and became framed as a process that brought us closer together.

As such, the free market became the symbol of equality and freedom, itself, in the US. Jodi Melamed (2011) describes the reformulation of equality, fairness, and social justice in market terms as neoliberal multiculturalism. Neoliberal multiculturalism, she explains, situates “the equality of the free market as the most fundamental expression of equality, and to make the diversity of goods, services and capital flowing across national boundaries stand for the best manifestation of multiculturalism” (Melamed, 2011, p. 139). It essentially creates a “new kind of multicultural formalism to make US leadership for global capitalism (the Bush administration’s so-called Economic Freedom Agenda) appear just” (Melamed, 2011, p. 137).

Importantly, the cultural politics of neoliberal multiculturalism situates the market as inherently objective, colorblind, and fair as it simultaneously suggests that equality has already been won for traditionally marginalized identities, often manifesting in post-feminist, post-racial rhetoric. With the proposition that no barriers or systemic discrimination exist any longer to oppress certain groups, mythologies of meritocracy center individual hard work and agency as the source of success—or the reverse, a lack of individual effort as the source of failure (Melamed, 2011).

According to Melamed (2011) neoliberal multiculturalism is communicated to students within the university through the teaching of “differentiated citizenship” in “so-called leadership
training and discourses of mission, benevolence, and service” (p. 228). A concept borrowed from Aihwa Ong, differentiated citizenship proposes that because of personal choices, some individuals are worthy and others are not, leading to differential treatment and rights, regardless of race, gender, or ability. Melamed (2011) explains:

As new categories for distinguishing more-worthy from less worthy persons come to overlay conventional racial categories, traditionally recognized racial identities, e.g. black, Asian, white, or Arab/Muslim, now occupy both sides of the more worthy/less worthy divide. (p. 151)

Thus, the vast inequities still present within the US, are no longer understood as the result of systemic discrimination, but instead in terms of effort, deservedness, and merit. Those who are poor or unsuccessful are framed as having earned their fate because of bad choices or the lack of willpower on their part.

As students engage in these discourses of success/failure and worthy/unworthy, the university—and leadership training as a tool of it—“influence the self-making of elites and of the technologies of subjugation that elites learn to exercise in order to manage less-profitable populations” (Melamed, 2011, p. 141). For those students who are privileged and do succeed, this kind of rhetoric will only encourage the misconception that those at the top deserve to be there because of hard work and those at the bottom similarly deserve their fate, preserving notions of white supremacy and male dominance, among other things. Moreover, as students come to recognize others based on differentiated citizenship and neoliberal multiculturalism, they also come to recognize themselves in different ways. Although it is not inherently problematic to encourage students to believe in themselves, to work hard, or to find confidence and understanding through self-reflection, it is problematic when this is the only message given to students while other systemic injustices go without mention.
If we read Besley and Peter’s (2007) theorizing of the responsibilized self alongside Melamed’s (2011) discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism, we can see how leadership training works to reestablish the apotheosis individual in neoliberalism as it obfuscates systemic critique. Neoliberal multiculturalism essentially erases systemic inequities that are still prevalent within the US, as it centers individual choices and hard work. The reconceptualization of race and gender relations has reified the market as the arbiter of equality and individual choice as the determiner of future success, placing all the responsibility, and the consequences of future success or failure, onto students. Thus, it could be argued that the new emphasis on leadership development in higher education is much less about creating well-rounded, engaged citizens, and instead much more about creating responsibilized leaders. This also brings forth the idea that not only can everyone be a leader but also then, that everyone should be a leader if they want to achieve any sort of success in life. Neoliberal multiculturalism and the responsibilized self create the conditions in which the everyone-can-be-a-leader ideology can make sense in a society where structural and systemic inequality and inequity is still prevalent and ever-growing.

Because if everyone can be a leader, then no one has an excuse to fail.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

I opened this chapter by describing First Step, a leadership development pilot launched by Freedom University in the summer of 2012. To bring the discussion full circle, I want to close by reporting that at the end of the 2012-2013 academic year, the First Step program was dissolved. While there are varying accounts as to why the program did not see another year, I heard from several former colleagues that the problem was not First Step, but rather faculty and program reorganization. It seems even leadership, as lauded as it is in higher education, is not impervious to the neoliberal restructuring of the academy. But First Step’s dissolution is not a
sign that leadership programs are decreasing in prominence or status. On the contrary, leadership discourse and development initiatives are ubiquitous within higher education; an integral component of the university structure.

In this chapter I traced the popular theory of leadership in higher education that proposes everyone can be a leader. The prevailing assumption is that “at all levels in an organization, individuals can and do become leaders” (King, Altman, Lee, 2011, p. 10) and that “The opportunities for leadership are available to all of us everyday” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. XVII). However, leadership has not always been the desirable or accessible position it is today and has had to undergo several transformations as a discourse before it became understood as an inclusive, appealing practice. Dislodging leadership from management and the trappings of the corporate office meant that not only was leadership no longer bound to certain contexts and positions, but that everyone had the opportunity to become a leader regardless of experience or title. Furthermore, the self-making focus of leadership created a discourse that supposedly anyone could access regardless of their social location. The framing of leadership as non-positional made leadership a choice, the proposal that leadership was rooted in self-development made it personal.

Although perhaps a well-meaning theory of leadership development, the ‘everyone can be a leader’ model and the focus on self-improvement is reflective and productive of the neoliberal context and ideology. Specifically, in this chapter, I examined the neoliberal logics of individualization and responsibilization as processes which not only create the conditions within which the everyone-can-be-a-leader theory makes sense, but also how this theory of leadership holds the potential to reify exclusionary logics, particularly for women and/or people of color. Ultimately, neoliberal ideology “encourages workers to see themselves not as ‘workers’ in a
political sense, who have something to gain through solidarity and collective organization, but as ‘companies of one’” (Read, 2009, p. 30). And this is important to address in leadership, especially in the time of Sandberg’s (2013) Lean In, where a systemic critique of patriarchy is once again set aside for more individualized approaches. Rather, the leader/manager split in conjunction with calls for increased diversity in the 1990s coalesced to form a discourse of leadership that promises success on the horizon given the proper self-investment as it simultaneously occludes systemic injustice and collaborative political mobilization (explored more in Chapter 6). Tracing the ‘everyone can be a leader’ model in leadership discourse, then, can provide insight into the ways in which neoliberal ideology works not in opposition to, but through the language of openness and inclusion, allowing for power to be recuperated under the guise of diversity and identity politics.

However, crucial to the emergence of the notion that everyone could be a leader, was that everyone would want to be. The leadership industry’s insistence on cultivating leadership through self-development has constituted development practices that situate leadership as a moral imperative, an authentic practice. In the next chapter, I further discuss the technologies of self that leadership deploys. If we contextualize this push for self-development in leadership and the proposal that everyone can be a leader, we can see that it is not necessarily as much of a ‘choice’ as we might think, and that selves we create are not necessarily so benevolent or value-neutral either.

As a pervasive, circulating discourse within the university, the concept of ‘leadership’ takes a more tangible, material condition in the form of trainings, workshops, and texts when deployed as leadership development. The current landscape of leadership development varies by university and within the very campuses themselves, as different departments utilize different approaches. As the Leadership Coordinator at Freedom University, I experienced leadership development programs that had participants swinging on ropes and hopping over rolling logs, with the belief that our physicality was the best way to discover our personal leadership styles. When not on obstacle courses, the development sessions resembled group therapy circles, and I found myself forced to participate in small group icebreakers where each person divulges personal anecdotes in order to self-reflect on their leader persona.

In this chapter I explore the particular practices that come to constitute ‘leadership development’ within the neoliberal university. In Chapter 4, I described the leadership industry as a compendium of resources dedicated to making each and every person a leader (for a price). To support the claim that everyone can be a leader, the industry—and by extension, university, which relies on the industry’s materials to inform their leadership initiatives on campus—has reflected and propagated several prevailing assumptions about the concept of leadership and how best to develop it within individuals. Barbara Kellerman (2012) outlines these assumptions as
the following: (1) that leadership can be learned (and that it can be taught, as well); (2) that it can be learned by all sorts of people (regardless of social location, background, title, or position); (3) that it can be learned quickly and easily over a short period of time by reading certain books or completing specific trainings (just adopt these five behaviors and you, too, can be a leader!); and lastly, (4) that the best way to nurture leadership potential is through self-development (that given enough self-work and self-awareness every individual can become a leader). While all of these assumptions in mainstream leadership theory are interconnected and ripe for analysis, the focus of this chapter is to examine the leadership development techniques that primarily centralize the last assumption: that self-development is essential to leadership development.

The theory of Authentic Leadership can illuminate predominant discussions surrounding the self-development practices within leadership development currently. Authentic Leadership theorists suggest that authentic leaders are those who act in accordance with their true selves and values at all times—inspiring followers to do the same. To reach this state of self-mastery, the individual must engage in a long journey of self-discovery to develop high self-awareness and authenticity. Breaking down the notions of ‘self-discovery,’ ‘authenticity,’ and ‘journey,’ that constitute Authentic Leadership, I use the figure of *homo economicus*—the economically rational, entrepreneurial, and competitive subject—to draw parallels between contemporary leadership development and neoliberal subjectivity. Because I treat leadership as a discourse, I understand leadership as involved in the constitution and production of subjectivity—the ways in which people are made subjects, a manner or mentality guiding the ways in which individuals choose to live their lives and conceive of life itself (Read, 2011). As leadership development becomes a moniker for self-development, I analyze how leadership development practices constitute the ‘leader’ as a subject position for students; the very forms of student and leader
subjectivity that neoliberalism engenders and constrains. Specifically, I trace how the techniques and practices of leadership development reflect and reproduce neoliberal modes of subjectivity in that they: (1) map economic logic onto human body through assessment tools that then further enmesh personal identity with work identity; (2) require a revealing of the self which produces an identity as much as they reflect one for legibility and ranking through forms of confession; and (3) reify forms of neoliberal work practices involving immaterial labor and consumer citizenship through engaging individuals in a continuous self-making process. As Authentic Leadership (and other popular leadership theories) hail students into these specific self-making processes to cultivate leadership, I argue that leadership discourse fosters the conditions under which homo economicus, as a desirable embodiment for students, becomes accomplished.

However, the concept of homo economicus has seen many iterations. Adding to the tradition, this analysis complicates and extends the figure by introducing Marxist and feminist-poststructural considerations of the concept to bring homo economicus into the current fold of leadership development in the neoliberal university. Drawing on Foucault’s conceptualization of homo economicus, I rethink the figure through introducing Wendy Brown’s (2015b) neoliberal homo oeconomicus and Micki McGee’s (2005) belabored self into the conversation. While homo economicus speaks to the economization of the human subject, neoliberal homo oeconomicus and the belabored self highlight the reconfigurations of labor—both personally and socially—which creates the impetus for individuals to agentically take on and enact a homo economicus conception of self as the entrepreneurial, self-made leader. In other words, homo economicus becomes belabored, or perhaps, homo economicus-expressimus (expressimus being the Latin translation for belabored).
In the sections that follow, I examine the Authentic Leadership principles of self-discovery, revelation, and journey, to map how these discourses are symptomatic and expressive of neoliberalism within the university, and to trace how the culture of self-help and self-making—one where individuals are offered endless opportunities and resources to work on or create themselves—represent and constitute homo economicus within students. First, I look at how the psychological science’s—the study of applying psychological techniques in the workplace and organizations—foray into leadership studies inspired a focus on the self and shaped many of the contemporary practices and models of leadership development. I then briefly describe Authentic Leadership and the main components of the theory that I disentangle later in the chapter. Next, I outline the figure of homo economicus before exploring certain practices of leadership development—those of Authentic Leadership—which constitute student subjectivity. I look to the specific discourses of self-discovery, revelation, and journey to illustrate how homo economicus, as well as other neoliberal and individualizing discourses, manifest. Reflecting on these current practices of leadership development, I end the chapter with an extended discussion on neoliberal subjectivity that brings homo economicus into the contemporary leadership context through the works of McGee and Brown.

**Situating the Self in Leadership: A Brief History**

Before delving into the specific self-development tactics used within leadership development, it is important to first consider the historical emergence of the imperative to discover the self in leadership discourse. Particularly, the involvement of the psychological sciences—research and practices concerning the cognitive, social, and developmental processes of the human mind and behavior—within leadership is important to examine as it aids in understanding not only leadership’s current preoccupation with the self, but also the shifting
conceptualizations of the individual manager and/or leader that emerged over the latter half of the 20th century. In the early 20th century, Frederick Winslow Taylor’s theories of Scientific Management as well as the Hawthorne Experiments created a space in management discourse for industrial psychology to gain prominence in the US. With the start of World War II in the late 1930s, psychologists were inspired to discover the essential traits of individuals who would do well under extreme stress and help ‘the good guys’ win the war (Rost, 1991). Accordingly, during this time, trait theories of leadership—those which focus on how individuals’ unique personality traits affected their leadership capabilities—emerged as the dominant model (e.g., charismatic leadership). One of the most popular studies on trait theory was conducted by psychologists Gordon Allport and Henry Odbert (1936), who found over 4,000 different traits by which to classify individuals and determine their leadership capacities. The essentialist and individualist orientation of trait theories resembled Carlyle’s Great Man theories of the late 19th century that assumed leadership was an innate quality. Trait theories remained popular well into the 20th century and reappear today in 21st century discourses regarding ‘emotional intelligence,’ for example (e.g., Goleman, 2005).

During and immediately following World War II, psychological attitude and personalities tests became commonplace to evaluate morale, wartime preparedness, and the effectiveness of managers (Rose, 1999). Contrary to previous models of leadership or management that were strictly hierarchical and dictatorial, managers were now situated as one of the key elements in elevating employees’ positive attitudes, and they became responsible for creating an environment to support the individual worker. To reduce illness and absenteeism, management was to use psychological techniques to ‘match’ the individual with their vocation: to make them feel a part of, and involved in, the workplace (Rose, 1999). Indeed, “[t]he minutiae of the human soul—
human interactions, feelings, and thoughts, the psychological relations of the individual to the
group—had emerged as the new domain for management” (Rose, 1999, p. 72). Within the
factory, it became commonly understood that in knowing what drives and motivates workers,
what their aspirations were, and how their individual personalities might shape their engagement
with work, businesses could align individuals’ subjectivity with corporate outcomes (Rose,
1999). With this, leadership and/or management discourses had an individualizing orientation
with a diagnostic approach aimed to partner individual success with organizational goals.

The individual under scrutiny, however, shifted in the 1950s when the spotlight of
psychological expertise moved from improving employee productivity to improving
management itself. The Human Relations movement and Industrial Psychology were under
scrutiny for creating a climate of worker solidarity in which labor unions and the collective
bargaining programs were gaining momentum and were thought to have decreased factory
production and profit. Besides Industrial and Human Relations psychology, “managerial
weakness” was also held responsible (Rose, 1999, p. 99). The mission was clear: managers
needed to reestablish order. Pay-for-performance restructuring and pay differential calculations,
for example, were to be carried out scientifically and with the help of psychologists who
provided the strategies for such evaluation. Managers were thought to also need training that
would not only increase their productivity and “help them manage better but also make them
better persons” (Rose, 1999, p. 100). Leading the charge in the US was psychologist Kurt Lewin
who created a new model of training called T-groups. In T-groups, managers came together to
learn about themselves through problem solving, feedback, and group discussion (Marrow,
1969). The idea was that people could learn to become better leaders and managers by
“transform[ing] their own modes of personal existence in order to be adequate to wield
responsibility and to lead effectively” (Rose, 1999, p. 102). The prevailing assumption became that in order to improve the management, you must first improve the manager. It was at this time that leadership and management became conceptualized as “not simply functional but personal” (Gillies, 2013, p. 36; see also Macmurray, 1935, 1961).

Later in the 1960s, the focus shifted again, only this time from analyzing a leader’s traits to looking at their behaviors. Because previous trait theories could not identify any universal personality traits in great leaders, nor any connection between those leaders and organizational managers, researchers turned away from looking at innate qualities to observing the ways in which leaders behaved (Ford, Harding & Learmonth, 2008). One of the largest behavioral studies was Douglas McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory X and Theory Y conducted at the MIT Sloan School of Management. While previous management theories had characterized workers as self-centered, unmotivated, and uncomfortable with responsibility (Theory X), Theory Y suggested that individuals actually liked to work, and needed to work to give their life purpose (Weeks, 2011). McGregor (1960) stated: “The expenditure of physical and mental effort at work is as natural as play or rest . . . Man will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which he is committed” (p. 63). Theory Y contributed to a fuller understanding of the citizen subject as first and foremost a worker already circulating in other discourses at the time (Weeks, 2011). However, such considerations in the post-Fordist era were also symbolic of a shift in the Protestant work ethic from that which saw work as a calling and moral obligation, to that of work as a career that provides one with individual fulfillment (Weeks, 2011).

Along with the continued help of the psychological sciences, McGregor’s study and others throughout the 60s and 70s continued to advance the dissolution between work and life spheres. Industrial and humanist psychologists of the time argued that work could bring true
self-fulfillment, given the ‘proper’ self-evaluation. Abraham Maslow’s Self-Actualization theory, in particular, suggested that the self-actualized individual would "assimilate their work into the identity, into the self" (McGee, 2005, p. 42). Whether it be self-improvement trainings as the means by which to produce excellent leadership, or the belief that the best way to increase worker productivity is for management to manipulate the ego of the employee, work had become the domain for self-actualization and personal development. Consequently, “linking work to self-realization channeled the countercultural value of self-fulfillment back into the productive sphere—back into the workplace” (McGee, 2005, p. 112).

By the 1980s and 90s the strong push to separate leadership from management was well underway, as discussed in Chapter 4. Leadership was seen as superior to management, and thus leaders were recognized as something special (Ford, Harding & Learmonth, 2008). Moreover, unlike management, leadership was understood as non-positional and therefore an identity any individual could take up should they chose to. This moved theories of leadership away from explicit trait or behavior models and instead made leadership a matter of personal conviction and dedication. It also made leadership a practice of the self, where no longer was it enough for an individual to engage in the practices of leadership, but rather the individual needed to become a leader in order to fully achieve personal and professional success (Ford, Harding & Learmonth, 2008). With this, the emphasis on self-awareness and self-discovery in leadership discourse became pronounced in most leadership development texts. For instance, in Discovering the Leader in You, the authors state: “We believe that leadership can be learned, that self-awareness is critical to leadership development, and that people can learn, grow, and change so that they can become the kind of leader needed” (King, Altman, & Lee, 2011, p. 16). As the current leadership industry ensures that there are plenty of materials and resources available for budding
leaders, most leadership development programs or texts now resemble covert forms of self-help with reflective journaling, personality assessment tools, and inspiring tales of individuals’ successes and failures. Whether conceptualized as a competency, trait, or choice, the underlying message is nevertheless the same: engagement in self-development is imperative for developing leadership capabilities.

The Authentic Self: Discovery, Revelation, & the Journey

While over the last century, theories of leadership which focus on the individual and advocate for self-development have taken many forms (from trait, behavioral, or competency-based approaches to charismatic, transformational, or heroic models), in the contemporary moment, any discussion in leadership on the imperative of self-development will likely reference the literature on Authentic Leadership. The prevailing idea is that “If you want to be effective as a leader, then you must be an authentic leader” (George, 2007, p. 36). Scholars of Authentic Leadership unabashedly acknowledge their connection to the psychological sciences, particularly humanistic psychologists like Maslow (1968, 1971) and Carl Rogers (1959, 1963). Avolio and Gardner (2005) state, “Rogers and Maslow focused attention on the development of fully functioning or self-actualized persons, i.e., individuals who are ‘in tune’ with their basic nature and clearly and accurately see themselves and their lives” (p. 319).

While there exists an extensive amount of scholarship on the subject, most associate authentic leadership theories with Bruce J. Avolio and William L. Gardner’s (2005) special issue in The Leadership Quarterly on Authentic Leadership Development or Bill George’s (2007) work on the topic. According to Avolio and Gardner (2005), Authentic Leadership has no singular definition, but that at the most basic level, authentic leadership requires a high level of self-awareness and a positive, moral perspective. The authentic, self-aware leader, however,
must not only know themselves and their values, but must also constantly self-regulate so that they consistently act in accordance with them. While ‘authenticity’ may imply that one only needs to be responsible to themselves, Avolio and Gardner (2005) remark that once you add the word ‘leadership’ to the name, you acknowledge the relationship component and thus have a responsibility to others, particularly your followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). An authentic leader, then, recognizes and accepts that they are responsible for those beyond themselves, particularly the development of their followers. Furthermore, to develop one’s self-awareness and become authentic, Authentic Leadership requires the individual to embark on a journey of self-discovery. Authenticity is not necessarily an “either/or condition, i.e., people are never entirely authentic or inauthentic. Instead, they can more accurately be described as achieving levels of authenticity” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 321). In this way, Authentic Leadership understands leadership as a life-long process—not as a competency one can achieve, but a constant development practice that one has to continually work on within themselves to achieve.

In sum, to be an authentic leader, the individual must have (1) excellent self-awareness; (2) self-awareness that they accomplish through a never-ending journey of self-discovery where they identify their strengths and weaknesses, values and morals; as well as (3) a commitment to self-regulating in order to act in congruence with their values and morals; and that this may (4) consequently inspire their followers to do the same. While some scholars have gone through great pains to differentiate Authentic Leadership as a valid concept in its own right, Authentic Leadership is not necessarily a theory in and of itself, but rather a “root construct” or “the basis for what then constitutes other forms of positive leadership” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 328). Transformational or servant leadership, for instance, can fall under the umbrella of Authentic Leadership for their connection to positive psychology and emphasis on morality and self-
awareness. In this chapter, I use Authentic Leadership as both its own theory and as a prevalent, underlying discourse of several other popular leadership development models which draw on positive psychological models and evaluations. In the next section, I describe my understanding of neoliberal subjectivity further, particularly the figure of homo economicus, before analyzing the specific practices of leadership development within the university which come to constitute this neoliberal subjectivity for students.

**Homo Economicus & The Self-Invested Leader**

The historical shifts in the discourses of leadership simultaneously produce and reflect the changing shape and expectations of the leader subject position that individuals enact and/or perform. As McGee (2005) explains, “Social structures and individual identities are mutually constitutive: interconnected to such an extent that changes in the former necessarily produce changes in the latter, and, some would argue, visa versa” (p. 15). Therefore, an important part to understanding subjectivity are the historical and contextual conditions that may enable and constrain subjects to enact the leader position in some ways and not others. Since this project is concerned with the neoliberal moment, I take a closer look at the ways in which leadership discourse is intimately tied to the government and production of neoliberal subjectivity for students. It is here that some initial considerations of homo economicus become instructive. In this section, I briefly outline the concept of Foucault’s homo economicus before analyzing in more detail the ways in which the figure is cultivated in contemporary leadership practices.

Often said to have originated with Adam Smith’s work on man’s inclination to “barter, truck, and exchange” (Polanyi, 1957, p. 274) in the 18th century, then further defined by John Stuart Mill’s writing on the political economy in the 19th century, the concept of homo economicus has been the focus of a wide array of analyses for some time. In 1978-79, Michel
Foucault adopted the term to describe the new economic and entrepreneurial creature that emerged from the conditions of the neoliberalism. For Foucault, neoliberalism produces a new regime of truth and therefore “a new way in which people are made subjects: homo economicus is fundamentally different subject, structured by different motivations and governed by different principles” (Read, 2009, p. 28-29). Our analysis of homo economicus begins here.

In his lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault (2008) described homo economicus as the perfectly rational, self-interested, productive, and competitive subject of the neoliberal era. Emblematic of the new motivations and conceptualizations of labor and of the self that neoliberal ideology engenders, Foucault traced the shift from past considerations of the economic man as one who operates through exchange with others in the market, to the current economic man who is a market onto himself. In other words, rather than exchanging one’s labor or goods in return for whatever one needs, in the neoliberal marketplace man, himself, becomes the good, “being for himself his own capital, his own producer, the source of his earnings” (as cited in Brown, 2015b, p. 80). As competition replaced exchange, subjects now conceive of themselves in terms of a cost-benefit relationship, investing in themselves in ways that increase their value or ranking over others in the marketplace.

To talk about homo economicus, then, is to talk about the processes of human capital. The project of homo economicus is to relentlessly craft and procure value through various forms of personal investment and training (Read, 2009). In the current neoliberal moment, this includes anything from plastic surgery, to fitness regimens, educational degrees, or the number of followers one has on social media. Individuals are also often encouraged to turn to ‘experts’ through the use of self-help resources and life-coaching professionals to create the self or come to know themselves better. Conceptualized in this framework, and against the backdrop of the
psychological sciences, the self has become a diagnostic object, capable of being tweaked and realigned. Every action is now to be performed with the end goal of enhancing one’s value or desirability in every realm of existence. This requires that strategic choices even in non-wealth generating domains such as of housing, dating, leisure activities, and creative endeavors be made in ways which enhance the individual’s value (Brown, 2015b). Indeed, all aspects of life, of the self, are financialized. To wit, the disposition imperative that people enthusiastically approach themselves as investments is a financialization of affect itself. In other words, the new economic subject is to consider themselves as a product; a thing to be measured and then ranked.

In the next sections, I examine several prominent notions within Authentic Leadership, including self-discovery, revelation, and leadership as a journey. I look specifically at the techniques used in leadership development within the university—the theories, tools, practices, values, and metaphors leadership discourse relies on—and analyze they ways in which they may create and encourage the subjectivity of homo economicus for students.

**Discovering: For the Love of Models and Strengths Based Leadership**

In an article in Avolio and Gardner’s special issue, Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) declare that “A key factor contributing to the development of authentic leadership is the self-awareness or personal insight of the leader,” (p. 347). They propose that self-awareness is developed through self-reflection in order to gain clarity on one’s innermost values, motives, emotions, and goals (Gardner et al, 2005). While Gardner et al. do not specify what exactly that development process looks like, based on the shape of the leadership industry, it can be assumed that increasing self-awareness can be performed, at least in part, through any number of the available trainings, self-reflective activities, or assessment tools which promise to
provide individuals the appropriate self-discovery means and thus the opportunity for greater insight into who they truly are (Ford & Harding, 2011).

Reflective of the involvement of the psychological sciences and self-help culture, many leadership books and development practices opt for administering various assessments, such as personality quizzes, to help people identify their ‘true’ self or unique leadership style. Such tests are usually self-report measures, where individuals select the description that most closely resembles who they think they are or how they act from a set number of choices. The responses are then compiled and synthesized to produce a personal identity profile that tells the person about their specific strengths, weaknesses, behaviors, or leadership style. Many of these current assessment tools seen today in leadership were influenced by the psychodynamic approaches of the 1930s. While psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1938) believed that there was an innate, core personality, unique to every individual, his protégé Carl Jung (1923) extended Freud’s theory to look at how people’s personalities shaped their preferences for how they worked and interacted with others. Jung thought that these preferences could be separated out into 16 ‘types’ and eventually created his personality typology (e.g., ENFJ, ISTP). Later these 16 types would be taken up by Katharine Cook Briggs who would use them to create the well-known Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test—a test that is often used in leadership development trainings. In the 1970s, Abraham Zaleznik would use similar psychodynamic approaches to make his case for the difference between leaders and managers (as discussed in Chapter 4). Zaleznik (1977) felt that the distinction between leaders and managers went further than just mere performance, in that they were actually two different kinds of people. He argued, “They differ in motivation, personal history, and in how they think and act” (Zaleznik, 1977, para. 10). Today, it seems as though each leadership theory, from trait approaches to contingency models, has its own tests or
other quantitative instruments for assessing effective leadership. The Big Five test, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire, and the Leadership Grid are just a few (Northouse, 2007).

For students in the university, The Student Leadership Practices Inventory, created by Kouzes and Posner (2012), or the Leadership Identity Development Model by Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen (2006) are popular leadership assessment tools. Though they do not directly refer to student leadership development, universities also like to use Wiley’s DISC Profile and Gallup’s StrengthsFinder assessment. Indeed, StrengthsFinder is so widely respected in higher education that over the summer of 2016, 29 Student Affairs professionals at Freedom University were trained on campus to become Gallup Certified Strengths Coaches. The StrengthsFinder leadership assessment requires individuals to identify themselves along the spectrum of 177 paired statements. After the assessment, each individual is assigned five leadership strengths from a total of 34 different possible strengths. Like so many contemporary leadership assessment tools, Gallup (2012) insists that StrengthsFinder should be considered “a starting point for self-discovery” (p. ix). However, unlike leadership or self-development literature that looks to help improve individuals in their relative areas of weakness, the Strengths theory argues that individuals need to focus on improving what is already strong within them (what one is naturally skilled at). They state that “those who strive to be competent in all areas become the least effective leaders overall” (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 7). Strengths Coaches are trained to analyze the results of an individual’s StrengthsFinder report and to provide the individual with guidance on how to achieve personal or organizational success based on their strengths. Illustrative of the investment (literal and figural) that universities place in
leadership discourse, each department at Freedom University paid $3,150 for every person they sent to the coaches training—the grand total being $91,350.

But in the quest for self-discovery, in searching for one’s strengths, what is being found? Central to much of the discussion on self-making in leadership is that individuals reflect on themselves to the point where they discover their ‘core values.’ For example, the assumption of Authentic Leadership is that “the more people remain true to their core values, identities, preferences and emotions, the more authentic they become” (Avolio, Gardner, Walumba, Luthans, & May, 2004, p. 802). However, in other articles of Avolio and Gardner’s (2005) special issue, some contributors argue that authentic leaders should internalize core *organizational* values in their quest to achieve authenticity rather than operate off their own personal core values. In Gardner et al.’s (2005) “Can you see the real me?: A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development” the authors declare:

For authentic leaders, we expect their hoped-for selves will reflect the leader’s role as an agent for positive change with respect to themselves and others. Such leaders may also imagine a feared self who lets followers down by failing to live up to core organizational values, and thereby compromises the organization’s mission. (p. 353)

Here, we see that the expectation is that the selves developed in the process of self-discovery are those which align with the organization or company. An authentic leader then is not only someone who leads others, but one who coheres with the organization. Later, Gardner et al.’s (2005) insist that authentic leaders are intrinsically driven by work, itself, to the point where they become “so engrossed in their work that they are motivated solely by a sense of curiosity, a thirst for learning, and the satisfaction that comes from accomplishing a valued task/objective” (p. 355). With this perspective on authenticity, the individual is pushed to create an understanding of the self so entangled with the organization that the two become indistinguishable (Ford & Harding, 2011).
This is not unusual for the neoliberal moment which seeks to tie the self to work in a variety of ways. Nick Couldry (2008) states that authenticity or “deep acting” is actually “based on internalization of the performance of norms of the job as ‘natural’” (p. 7). Employees are expected to smile, be positive, friendly, and professional. Any resistance to this idea is neutralized under the current positivity movement that insists “in the end your ‘real’ self must come out” (Couldry, 2008, p. 10). As work and the self merge within the Authentic Leadership model, what results is a continual self-monitoring professional rationalized through the rhetoric of core values and being ‘true to one’s self.’ As Ford and Harding (2011) argue, this “is disquieting, for it means that the concept of [Authentic Leadership] can be seen to be a form of control over employees (managers and staff)” (p. 470). In this way, leadership theories are not about becoming your ‘true’ self—there is no way to ever know who that is—but rather aligning yourself with the predetermined and presented values of the organization for which you work.

In relation to this analysis, leadership development training, books, or programs become one of the primary strategies or technologies with which to build a relationship with the self through neoliberal rationale. Assessments like StrengthsFinder or the discovery of core values performs several tasks in terms of constituting homo economicus and neoliberal considerations of selfhood, as they are emblematic of leadership development processes which are individualizing, embedded in relations of identity formation, and therefore disciplining. The very idea that individuals can be quantified and sorted into various categories is reflective of neoliberal notions of selfhood where the self is situated as a measurable object. As reviewed in Chapter 2, technologies of the self—those which engage individuals in their own subjectivity—look to define the individual and then to control their conduct. Using StrengthsFinder as a technology of the self, works to define the individual by assigning them traits and then to control
their conduct through tips for improvement or ways in which they can work with others of
different or similar strengths. Such practices then, participate in identity formation, making
power “enabling and productive as well as subordinating” (Collinson, 2011, p. 185). To
‘develop’ an identity as not only a leader but also an individual with particular strengths or traits
is a normalizing process, making one easy to categorize, sort, and describe, and therefore also
easy to control and make docile under regimes of power (Foucault, 1977). As Foucault (1977)
states, in order to make subjects docile, “one must have a station in life, a recognizable identity,
an individuality fixed once and for all” (p. 291). Although we may find comfort in ‘knowing
ourselves’ better as a result of these technologies, using these kinds of texts and tests in
leadership serve as a mode of discipline, producing information about individuals that allows us
to then control and sort them.

As self-assessment become the crux of leadership development, leadership becomes
another mode of expertise through which individuals can access or come to ‘know’ the self, and
then represent that self to others. In order for the developing self-aware leader to be recognized
as such, the individual is required to share their new self-discoveries, be it their core values or
assessment results, with their peers, team, or coworkers. And because of language’s
performative function, telling others what one is, constitutes one’s self as much as it might reveal
it (Besley & Peters, 2007). This brings us to a second way that neoliberal self-making is mapped
onto the body in the next section: through the eyes of others.

Revealing: Techniques of Confession in Leadership Development

Confession constitutes the self as much as assessment tools do. The cultural practice of
confession has its roots in European Catholicism, dating back as early as the 13th century.
Confession entails the act of disclosing the truth about not only one’s actions, but also one’s
innermost private thoughts—one’s feelings, desires, or weaknesses—to an external audience who will judge, evaluate, and provide prescriptive feedback in response. Confession hallmarks a shift in techniques of self-scrutiny where one’s very thoughts could become a site for external assessment (Rose, 1999). In this way, confession is not a solitary performance, where the individual laments on their own and then without any outside interference comes to some higher plane of consciousness or self-awareness. Rather, confession is a relational act where the individual must confess and reveal themselves to others. They must look to an external authority who can then evaluate the revealed information and then reflect it back to the confessor. In this way, power/knowledge within the relationship resides “not in the person who speaks but in the one who questions and listens” (as cited in Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 36). In the 18th century confessional practices came to engender and inform a variety of discourses, including education, medicine, and psychiatry. For example, a central component of Freud’s cathartic method was for individuals to talk and express their deepest emotional trauma in order to treat their underlying illness—it would become known as the ‘talking cure.’ And over the last century with the ‘therapeutic turn’ and expansion of the psychological sciences into all arenas, the individual would become what Foucault called a “confessing animal” (Rose, 1999, p. 244).

Confessionary procedures are now commonplace in leadership development trainings within higher education. Particularly in university settings, not only do you have to take the leadership assessment or quiz, but then you must make public this information about yourself with others. For example, when I was the Leadership Coordinator, the entire office staff was required to take the StrengthsFinder assessment as described previously. Employees’ five strengths were then collected and revealed to all the staff as a professional development tool. On a PowerPoint slide at the workshop each person’s strengths were displayed as well as several
themed groupings—showing some individuals were more similar than others within the office. Rendered visible, we were then separated into our various strengths categories to discuss how we saw ourselves, and how we may work well or poorly with the other ‘types’ of people. While cast as a teambuilding and personal development exercise, situated in relation to the ideology of neoliberalism, such practices connect to Foucault’s (1977) ideas about surveillance and discipline as well as his ideas regarding confession. Not only are you required to take the test and discover your supposed strengths, but then you must come together as a group, like I did with the staff, and publicly share this information. In this way, “the self is to be developed only through the notions of others as an audience” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 13). The practice that individuals share (confess) their leadership category and render themselves legible to others also further illustrates the visibility and calculability demanded under neoliberalism, often communicated through the rhetoric of ‘transparency.’ From now on, what one does after being labeled—their future behavior—will be read as a product of the assigned strength from the test. People may say: “Oh that is such and achiever thing to do!” or “leave it to the idealist to think of that!” Therefore, in using these kinds of texts and tests a way to develop knowledge about oneself, these guides are in fact also serving as a mode of discipline, producing information about “individuals, rendering them visible, calculable, and self-disciplining selves” (Collinson, 2011, p. 185).

If not necessitated in the form of the exercises themselves, the very discourse of leadership also requires a confessionary revelation of oneself in order to be considered a leader. Authentic leadership, by definition, demands it. “Authentic leaders must be prepared to reveal themselves through their practices and behaviours, and the self that is revealed must be the authentic self” (Ford & Harding, 2011, p. 467). The audience on the receiving end of said reveal
is assumed to be the authentic leader’s followers. Scholars of Authentic Leadership emphasize
the importance a leader’s responsibility to their followers, insisting that they must be the moral
compass which inspires followers toward moral and positive goals (Avolio & Gardner, 2005)
declare. Not only do underlying logics within leadership, especially in combination with ideas
professionalism and being self-motivated or dedicated, create a leader that is always self-
surveilling and self-monitoring because they are being watched and defined by others, but it also
pressures leaders into a practice of coerced confession. If, by definition, a leader needs
followers, and Authentic Leadership demands that leaders reveal themselves in order to gain
followers to then further inspire, can one be a leader if they choose not to reveal? The self
contradictory nature of these leadership development practices insists that they celebrate self-
responsibility and choice even as they take self-determination away because not sharing is not a
viable choice—because if you do not share you are not a leader.

If the loss of being recognized as a leader is not pressure enough to divulge, the
emotional policing involved in many leadership development practices at universities should do
the trick. At a staff professional development session where I was particularly cranky at the idea
of participating once again in an overly personal icebreaker activity, I was chastised by the group
facilitator for having a “bad attitude.” Ironically, we had to spend 10 minutes discussing why I,
personally, did not like these kinds of activities—another facet of my personality on the table for
external eyes and judgements. There can also be social repercussions for asking hard
questions—or even questions at all—during leadership development trainings despite the
neoliberal environment which touts transparency and openness. As another example, at one
point during my career as the Leadership Coordinator, we were tasked with taking the DiSC
assessment: another personality evaluation identified as a “non-judgmental tool used for
discussion of people's behavioral differences” (DiSCProfile, n.d.). Like StrengthsFinder, the DiSC assessment involves completing an online questionnaire where you answer questions about yourself (some of them stranger than others like “Are you happy all the time? or “Have you ever been told you light up a room?”) and then your responses are analyzed and you are assigned to a particular personality category (see Figure 1). I was categorized under Conscientiousness and Dominance (CD) (see Figure 2). While the DiSC facilitators assured the staff that no letters are more valued than any other, in this neoliberal culture of superficial pleasantries we all know that those who get classified under Steadiness or Influence in the office are certainly seen with a different lens than those categorized as Dominant—particularly if you are a woman. Nevertheless, everyone was assigned to a category and then all of our results are compiled to reveal our full staff profile—yet another confessionary moment.

Figure 1. Outline of the DiSC Styles. © Copyright 2012 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Everything DiSC Workplace® is a registered trademark of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries.
Upon seeing our results, there was one chart, in particular, that caught my eye (see Figure 3). The staff was split into two categories so that we could better understand our ‘DiSC Culture’—defined in the packet they gave us as our “group culture” or “the way we do things” as a staff. Under the first bar in the graph it said “Questioning/Skeptical” and under the other “Accepting/Warm.” I, no surprise, was on the questioning side. But what is so interesting is the chosen separation and categories themselves. The opposite of accepting and warm could be rejecting and cold but the DiSC assessment constructed it as questioning and skeptical.

Naturally then, when we were all brought together to discuss the findings, I raised my hand and said that “I am pretty sure Martin Luther King Jr. was a bit skeptical during his time, and he even asked some questions. But I doubt anyone would claim that he was not also accepting and warm in his actions?” The room grew quiet, my behavior was immediately attributed to my CD nature, and so I was easily brushed off without any consideration—but in a really warm manner though.
The DiSC chart is both symptomatic and productive of the binary and separation that we apply between those that cause disruptions and those that do not. Although an arbitrary and socially constructed separation, the DiSC assessment’s division between questioning and warm makes sense in a neoliberal positivity culture (Ehrenreich, 2009) which seeks to constitute subjects that consistently engage in ‘happy talk’ (Ahmed, 2012) despite how they might actually be feeling. For instance, Barbara Ehrenreich (2009) in her book *Bright-Sided*, describes her personal collision with positivity culture when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Angry and upset with her present condition, Ehrenreich (2009) was consistently met with people who adopted a more positive outlook and characterized breast cancer as a ‘gift’ or a ‘rite of passage.’ In positivity culture, cancer is “a chance for creative self-transformation—a makeover opportunity, in fact, . . . cheeriness is required” (Ehrenreich, 2009, p. 31). Attending group therapy sessions and marching in Susan G. Komen cancer walks, Ehrenreich’s (2009) patience waned and she was exiled from several cancer support groups for not having a better attitude about her diagnosis. Reflecting on her experience, Ehrenreich (2009) states:
What it gave me, if you want to call it a “gift,” was a very personal, agonizing encounter with an ideological force in American culture that I had not been aware of before—one that encourages us to deny reality, submit cheerfully to misfortune, and blame only ourselves for our fate. (p. 44)

It must be considered that part of Ehrenreich’s (2009) experience in positivity culture was a result of the gendered expectations associated with both thinking positively and with breast cancer. Indeed, positivity culture is further complicated by the fact that it looks differently when mapped onto different bodies. Sara Ahmed (2010) describes how feminist women become framed as killjoys, queer-identified individuals as unhappy, and migrants as melancholic. These people are ‘unhappy subjects’ according to Ahmed (2010) and penalized at every turn, for every emotion that is not happy. We can think about how this might appear in leadership practices like the DiSC assessment which penalize those who speak out or launch critique. Stereotypes of the ‘angry black woman’ create the conditions where any negative affect from women of color is often read as over the top or excessive. As Ahmed (2010) argues, “To speak out in anger as a woman of color is to confirm your position as the cause of tension; your anger is what threatens the social bond” (p. 67-68). In the Social Change Model (mentioned in Chapter 4), one of the key practices is Controversy with Civility—that we should not hide from disagreements but engage with others when our opinions differ in a respectful manner. If we think about positivity culture alongside Ahmed’s analysis, how might a black woman, then, be able to participate in controversy with civility?

Undoubtedly, positive psychology is a part of this positivity culture and similar messages underscore many leadership theories. In fact, Authentic Leadership emerged alongside the positive psychology movement of the new millennium. While scholars of Authentic Leadership trace it origins to the Greek proverb “Know Thyself,” others have noted that Authentic Leadership came in response to charismatic leadership and pseudo-transformational models
which did not center positive values in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Ford & Harding, 2011). The denial of anything ‘bad’ is so common in leadership literature that some of the most powerful leaders have not been widely discussed in Leadership Studies because their actions do not fit the presumed moral goodness we expect from leaders (Kellerman, 2004; Spector, 2016). For example, Hitler or cult leader Jim Jones both exhibited the ability to influence and lead a large number of people. However, because they did terrible things, leadership gurus have largely ignored them in conversations. Although there is nothing inherently or essentially good about leadership—no implicit moral dimension—their absence is illustrative of the fact that morality underlies discussion of leadership nonetheless (Gillies, 2013).

Consequently, the worst characteristics of leaders are usually left unidentified in the processes of self-discovery (Ford & Harding, 2011; Kellerman, 2004; Spector, 2016). As Ford and Harding (2011) critique, “There is no room, in [Authentic Leadership], for self-knowledge to reveal anything that is not positive. The individual is not allowed a dark side” (p. 467). Instead, confidence, hope, optimism, and resiliency were identified by Luthans and Avolio (2003) as several of the key personality traits authentic leaders must possess. As Avolio and Gardner (2005) declare: “We believe the inclusion of a positive moral perspective is crucial to the emerging work on authentic leadership development” (p. 324). Perhaps it goes without saying, but the moment certain traits or perspectives are demanded as part of authenticity, the actuality of anything authentic becomes a fantasy. Instead, the assigning of positive affects or traits within Authentic Leadership demonstrates once again that ‘authenticity’ is not open to interpretation within each individual, but a disciplining discourse that prescribes values under the rhetoric of genuineness and individuality.
If we read modes of confession, surveillance, and positivity policing in combination, we find an “affective language that describes life under capitalism” (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 19)—deploying technologies which actively shape and constitute our relationships with ourselves and others. As the competitive subject, homo economicus seeks to improve themselves in a way that enhances their appeal over that of others. In leadership, we rely on external measurements and the audience of others or our followers to sort and rank us. As we internalize such evaluations, we then work to make changes, fearing we might decrease in value or that others might disinvest. What results is often a forced confessionary environment—buttressed by labeling and surveillance—and a never-ending engagement with quantified and controlled self-making measures that while appearing as though to grant individuals more freedom and self-control, in fact reduce any agency students may be able to enact to a range of preset choices.

It also creates competition rooted in relentless emotional regulation, where the most successful leaders are framed as having become so because of their constant positive attitude and moral righteousness. The scholars of Authentic Leadership even imply as much.

Authentic leaders seem to know which personality traits they should reveal to whom, and when. . . . They retain their distinctiveness as individuals, yet they know how to win acceptance in strong corporate and social cultures and how to use elements of those cultures as a basis for radical change. (Goffee & Jones, 2005, p. 88)

It seems that in order to keep oneself competitive, various emotional and personality assets must be controlled. The notion that leaders monitor themselves as they continue on a journey of self-discovery, constituting an always surveilling, always self-regulating subject, is explored further in the next section.

**Journeying: Leadership as a Process and Never-ending Story**

Opening his aptly named chapter, “Leadership is a Journey,” Bill George (2007) asserts: “There is no such thing as an instant leader” (p. 2). Rather, George (2007), a well-known
proponent of Authentic Leadership, warns his readers that leadership is a journey which takes dedication and time—a lifetime even—to develop. Leadership described as a journey is also apparent in many other mainstream leadership texts and theories as well. For example, in *Discovering the Leader in You*, King, Altman, and Lee (2011) state: “The most effective leaders come to understand that the leadership journey is an ongoing, dynamic process without a clear beginning, middle, and end” (p. XV). Tied to the notion of leadership as a journey, many leadership industry gurus also argue that more development, more training, more books, or more workshops are necessary because leadership is a *process*. That although one can identify as a leader at any time, a true leader knows they are always developing, always becoming, similar to the notion of a lifelong learner, where “perpetual training” comes to replace schooling (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5).

Further describing the leadership journey, George (2007) explains that over the course of one’s life, every leader will either encounter different opportunities of leadership or that their leadership styles may change. Turning again to the self, the key to navigating the potentially bumpy and unpredictable journey of leadership, according to George and other Authentic Leadership aficionados, is to remember to stay true to one’s core self—to remain authentic at all moments. For instance, George (2007) advises that individuals reflect on their life story and tell that story to others (think back to our discussion on confession). Avolio and Gardner (2005), on the other hand, encourage self-regulation as a means to maintain authenticity over the course of one’s leadership journey. They define self-regulation as “the process through which authentic leaders align their values with their intentions and actions” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 325)—very similar to the psychological definition as “the ability to act in your long-term best interest, consistent with your deepest values” (Stosny, 2011, para. 1). Gardner et al. (2005) further
deconstructs self-regulation in leadership, explaining: “We expect the behavior of authentic leaders to be primarily driven by internalized regulatory processes and their identities to be self-concordant as they pursue an integrated set of goals that reflect personal standards of conduct” (p. 355). It seems that for Authentic Leadership theorists, despite the context or stage of the leadership journey, authenticity requires constant internal discipline in order to one maintain one’s authentic self.

Such a theory conceptualizes each individual as having a core self, separate from any external forces, as well as the ability to be wholly in control of one’s surrounding environment or future experiences. Gardner et al. (2005) acknowledge that their view of self-regulation draws heavily on self-determination theory—the idea that autonomous and rational individuals decide their fate through the choices they make or do not make. Like homo economicus, the notion of self-determination evokes that of an individual who defines their own life course through the rational, calculated choices that they make for their own benefit or interest. The inability to plan and perfectly map one’s life (or leadership journey) becomes seen as a personal failing, a waste even.

Theories of self-regulation in Authentic Leadership illustrate the cultural shift from Foucault’s disciplinary society to one of control, as articulated by Gilles Deleuze (1992) under neoliberalism. In his 1977 text Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault traces the development of several spaces of enclosure—the school, the hospital, the prison, the factory—which work to discipline and control bodies through strict methods of control that introduce ranking, sorting, and normalizing mechanisms. While such processes are still active in some ways, Deleuze (1992) argues that these institutions are “finished” and “new forces are knocking on the door” (p. 4). Deleuze (1992) offers in place of discipline, societies of control.
Coinciding with the neoliberal moment, increasing networks of connectivity, globalization, and technological advances have shifted society from the enclosures of the school, factory, or hospital to a web of entangled systems. Many now have the freedom to move about as they like, to purchase goods at anytime from anywhere, and be in constant communication with whomever we please. However, while these new mechanisms of freedom might appear as though to constitute self-determined subjects (as Authentic Leadership envisions) the opposite might be more accurate.

Control is not discipline. You do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is the only aim of highways, but people can travel infinitely and “freely” without being confined while being perfectly controlled. (Deleuze, 2007, p. 322)

Illusions of freedom are a key aspect of societies of control. Individuals are not controlled through the intensification of external forces of control, but through dispersed networks of power where individual agents keep themselves in line under the assumption of freedom and choice (Crain, 2013). For example, with smart phones that can access the internet at any time, individuals now have the freedom to take their work with them everywhere they go. However, as Cameron Crain (2013) argues, we must notice the ways in which such freedom “diffuses ‘responsibility’ throughout life.” (para. 2). He continues: “Perhaps it is nice to work from home, but now we are expected to be responsive to the demands of work even away from the office; to respond to emails in a timely manner” (Crain, 2013 para. 2). We become free at the price of constant and immutable entanglement in systems which may surveil and monitor our movements. The important thing to grasp is the way in which an apparatus of power can exert control over us precisely by letting us “do whatever we want” (Crain, 2013, para. 6).

Notions of self-regulation and leadership as a journey and/or process within the model of Authentic Leadership fit perfectly within a control society. What leadership theories like
Authentic Leadership reflect and reproduce with their discussion of self-regulation is an adherence to a disciplined neoliberal understanding of the subject. When all regulation is turned onto the self, there becomes a normalization of internalized surveillance where the subject will engage in continuous self-policing and self-monitoring. Not self-determined, but self-regulated, and regulated in ways we have discussed previously which align personal values with organizational ones, understandings of self with neoliberal rationale. Kathi Weeks (2011) discusses, in the context of neoliberal “work societies,” a similar idea in terms of professionalism (which is also a popular characteristic of leaders), describing how neoliberalism thrives on ideas of professionalism as it makes people internalize surveillance and therefore turn the policing onto themselves and other workers. The professional will self-monitor all day, regardless of if others are watching, which is desired by neoliberal rational which seeks unquestioning, self-governing bodies. If leadership is a process then, leaders would do well to remember not to stray too far from the orchestrated path of progress and development proposed by the leadership industry—self-regulating according to a predetermined order.

As a process or journey, becoming a leader requires consistent practice, engagement, and self-work. In proclaiming that leadership can be obtained through adopting these seven behaviors, learning those 21 laws of leadership, or finding one’s five strengths as a leader, these texts and discourses engage individuals in a ‘process’ of leadership and thus in the continual entanglement of development and progress; in a never-ending labor of identity development. Fittingly, developing self-awareness is also an action with no definitive endpoint or destination. There is no final moment at which one’s self can be fully and totally discovered and thus no longer in need of further examination or development. Avolio and Gardner (2005) proclaim that, “Self-awareness is not a destination point, but rather an emerging process where one continually
comes to understand his or her unique talents, strengths, sense of purpose, core values, beliefs and desires” (p. 324). Thus, leadership’s focus on self-development (in any form) in combination with leadership as a journey or process, necessitates that budding leaders commit to a continuous practice of leadership development. In fact, the leadership industry’s idea of leadership as a process embeds the subject in a continual mode of development, ensuring not only a life-long customer, but also a neoliberal subject: self-disciplining and self-governing in an effort to always improve and maximize themselves in market terms. In this way, the discourse of leadership development as a ‘process’ plays its part in constituting this neoliberal forms of labor, discussed in the next section.

Always Becoming a Leader: Homo Economicus-Expressimus

Although leadership development promises to reveal the true, authentic leader within you, it could be argued that in engaging with and undergoing its popular methods or processes one is perhaps not revealing but rather creating the self—becoming homo economicus- expressimus. Signaling the shift from seeing economics as separate from the individual to seeing the economics in human nature, Foucault’s articulation of homo economicus speaks to the notion (mentioned in previous chapters) that neoliberalism has become a form of governmentality: an all-encompassing condition of reality, “intimately tied to the government of the individual, to a particular manner of living” (Read, 2009, p. 27). The regimes of truth that neoliberalism produces are not imposed upon individuals through direct force, but rather enacted through “soft power,” presenting itself as common sense or prudent choices in a control society (Brown, 2015b, p. 35). In this way, the guiding principles of liberalism, like freedom and autonomy, actually work in the opposite fashion, as new forms of governmentality come to emerge through the personal and affective realms. As Jason Read (2009) explains, “This trajectory follows a
fundamental paradox; as power becomes less restrictive, less corporeal, it also becomes more intense, saturating the field of actions, and possible actions” (p. 29). Individuals are now not controlled by any outside source, but from within, as personal ‘interests,’ ‘aspirations,’ ‘desires’ come to replace externally imposed obligations. As Wendy Brown (2015a) summarizes, neoliberalism serves “as a form of political reason and governing that reaches from the state to the soul” (para. 12).

And in acting on the soul or the individual then, the figure of homo economicus exemplifies the “link between government and government of the self”—a governing without government (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 160). Subjects are obliged to see themselves as competitive forms of capital or objects that they can craft and enhance. Undoubtedly, this takes work. While, Foucault’s rendering of homo economicus is still applicable to the neoliberal modes of subjectivity in play today, Wendy Brown’s neoliberal homo oeconomicus and Micki McGee’s belabored self further highlight the figure specifically in light of current rearticulations of labor manifesting in leadership discourse. I attempt to recast and build upon homo economicus as homo economicus-expressimus which I analyze as actualized and cultivated within contemporary leadership discourse. Let us first look at McGee’s work on the belabored self.

As introduced in Chapter 4, the shape and growth of the leadership industry exists against the backdrop of the self-help revolution. With the neoliberal restructuring of the workforce, where competition, downsizing, and outsourcing are the new norm, constant self-improvement becomes framed as the only reliable insurance against economic insecurity or unemployment (McGee, 2005). McGee (2005) argues, that in such unstable economic times, it is not enough for an employee to be proficient in their duties, but rather individuals are expected to remain vigilant
in their self-making practices in order to be consistently employable. As such, one is required to not only work on themselves, but to do so continuously. McGee (2005) calls this the “belabored self,” as individuals must continually put effort toward self-improvement and self-making in order to remain desirable in the workforce (p. 16). The belabored self signals that within the neoliberal context not only have the spheres of life and work become enmeshed—where one should find their life’s purpose in their work—but also that one’s self is work, and needs to be worked on to remain marketable and desirable for work.

Like homo economicus, the belabored self is an object to be invested in and improved upon. Critical of the larger self-help movement, McGee (2005) argues “the promise of self-help can lead workers into a new sort of enslavement: into a cycle where the self is not improved but endlessly belabored” (p. 12). Hence, for McGee, the belabored self is a labor issue (as well as a gender issue, discussed later on). Counter to previous analyses of self-making culture, McGee (2005) argues:

One must recognize that the desire to invent a life is no longer evidence of narcissistic self-involvement or an emancipatory countercultural impulse, but rather is increasingly required as a new form of ‘immaterial labor’—mental, social and emotional tasks—required for participation in the labor market. (p. 24)

As consumer-citizens then, we often turn to outside technologies or experts to identify and ‘fix’ us. Heeding their advice, we engage in continuous labor practices to work on the self under their guidance. In organizations, the rhetoric of self-growth and ‘investing’ in oneself often exploits employees to spend unpaid time outside of work to learn the skills and tools necessary to remain marketable. Likewise, the everyone-can-be-a-leader discourse invites students into this belaboring of the self, framed as the best way to increase employment opportunities; an imperative action for a successful life.
In conjunction with McGee, the work of Marxist-feminist Wendy Brown (2015b) further extends the concept of homo economicus by complicating the notion of self-interest under neoliberalism. Brown’s (2015b) formulation, which she terms *neoliberal homo oeconomicus*, highlights the reformulation of ‘interest’ and ‘responsibility’ given the current political and social economy. For Brown, Foucault’s articulation of the self interested individual does not quite capture the fact that the market is now situated as necessary for one’s very survival. That:

rather than each individual pursuing his or her own interest and unwittingly generating collective benefit, today, it is the project of macroeconomic growth and credit enhancement to which neoliberal individuals are tethered and with which their existence as human capital must align if they are to thrive. When individuals, firms, or industries constitute a drag on this good, rather than a contribution to it, they may be legitimately cast off or reconfigured—through downsizing, furloughs, outsourcing, benefits cuts, mandatory job shares, or offshore production relocation. At this point, the throne of interest has vanished and at the extreme is replaced with the throne of sacrifice. (Brown, 2015b, p. 84)

Brown’s analysis directly addresses the reconstitution of choice and responsibility given that there is no outside of capitalism—one cannot merely elect themselves outside of neoliberal culture. Her critique of Foucault’s use of ‘interest,’ is that it obscures the all-encompassing nature of the neoliberal ethos. Rather, individuals are responsibilized, whether they like it or not, to become active participants in self-interested endeavors—not naturally driven to be self-interested, but the product of an ideology that conflates morality with self-reliance.

Brown and McGee’s work on the subject, bring the reformulations of labor into sharper relief than Foucault’s articulation of homo economicus. Homo economicus, for Brown and McGee, is not driven by personal will but rather the subject is constrained to make choices that “contribute to its appreciation or at least prevent its depreciation” (Brown, 2015b, p. 177). When we join McGee’s analysis of labor with Brown’s discussion of choice, we find new levels of exploitation and immaterial labor and thus homo economicus-expressimus. As there becomes a
continuous dedication to crafting one’s human capital, the tensions between labor and exploitation become effaced by homo economicus-expressimus where the individual agentically takes up laborious tasks of the self under the labels of identity development or a strong work ethic. As Brown (2015b) describes, it encourages the individual to see themselves as both the “member of a firm and as itself a firm” (p. 34). What ideas of subjects as entrepreneurs, “little capitals” (Brown, 2015b, p. 36), or the idea of life as a work of art (McGee, 2005) creates are the conditions under which labor on/of the self is not seen as labor at all. “[W]hen everything is capital, labor disappears as a category,” says Brown (2015, p. 38). Thus, homo economicus-expressimus represents the production of a subjectivity of relentless self-improvement—and also relentless unpaid labor—in the name of self-investment.

Homo economicus-expressimus highlights both the discourses which actualize the figure as a desirable embodiment for students and the very mechanisms for cultivating student leadership. Leadership development—newly rebranded from management—becomes one of the primary strategies in which to bridge the gap between economic viability and personal growth. Developing oneself as a leader is framed as a practicable, even savvy, strategy to remain appealing and viable in the workforce, as the demand for more leaders or leadership development can be heard from the halls of the university (Summers, 2001) to the cubicles of the private sector (Trapp, 2014). At the same time, the leadership industry has carefully crafted a definition of leadership which positions self-development as the first step toward not only great leadership but also internal growth and satisfaction. In practically all mainstream leadership programs or texts (particularly the ones found at universities) there exists at least one line or passage that discusses how leadership lies within everyone, that it is not title based but a process, and that given the ‘proper’ self-work, anyone can become a leader. Thus, with enough hard-
work and dedication (as well as the completion of various trainings or assessments), becoming a leader—enacting homo economicus-expressimus—ensures professional and personal success.

Luckily, leadership workshops, texts, and coaches have the tools for each person to become their best selves; to become the best leader. Brown’s and McGee’s work understands self-making as not only something deeply tied to labor but also industry and consumption/consumer culture. The university and its leadership development practices serve then as a site of commodity production and consumption for homo economics-expressimus to take flight. "The resulting contagion of insufficiency constitutes the self-improvement industry as both self-perpetuating and self-serving" (McGee, 2005, p. 18). Leadership development, as a form of self-help is inspired to make its readers feel insufficient and in need of ‘work.’ However, with leadership framed as non-positional, a process, and something can be acquired with more and more development the market creates a lifelong customer and wide consumer based. Moreover, with no way to quantify self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self-authenticity and thus no endpoint to the process of self-discovery in leadership, the developing student leader is embedded into a perpetual state of self-labor. As the imperative of self-discovery and authenticity demands leaders engage with self-assessment tools that map economic logic onto the human body, the notion of leadership as a journey hails all individuals into project of the self and the never-ending fray of self-work (McGee, 2005).

**Conclusion**

Situating homo economicus within contemporary manifestations of neoliberalization, I examined how leadership is involved in the production of neoliberal subjectivity, actualized in habits and perceptions. As psychological techniques became central within management, we saw the emergence of the conflation of self-making and leadership that is propagated in
mainstream texts today (e.g. Bennis & Nanus, 1985/2005; Cashman, 2008; Maxwell, 1999). In this analysis, I closely examined three popular leadership discourses: leadership as a means of discovery, leadership as authentic revelation, and leadership as a journey and/or process. This argument applied Foucault’s applications of technologies of the self to examine how leadership functions as one that invokes certain forms of conduct and governs the subject in ways that align with neoliberal logics and ideologies. While self-development is not an inherently problematic concept—critical pedagogy has encouraged the use of self-reflection as a radical act of resistance for some time (see Freire, 2003)—the overwhelming insistence both in and outside of academia on cultivating leadership through self-development dovetails nicely with the neoliberal era where the propagation of individualism is buttressed with the expansion of economic logic across every kind of social, political, and emotional terrain—even human nature.

Hence, these forms of neoliberal subjectivity or homo economicus are not something which can be—or which people even want to—refuse. Rather, it is as intimate part of our lives and their structure (Read, 2009, p. 34-35). Such a critique highlights the poststructural perspective that acknowledges humans exist between being culturally constrained, and at the same time, agentic in some respects. Therefore, I do not use homo economicus to suggest that students are these automatons or purely disciplined figures that will only ever make the most rational choices. Instead, theorizing homo economicus is meant to illustrate the kind of conditioning, training, and discourses imposed upon students within leadership development. Homo economicus assists me in illuminating the ties to neoliberal rationality and ideology that undergird popular leadership development practices, which while on the surface seem to express freedom, choice, and self-reflections, may nevertheless discipline and constrain students. While students are, of course, free to adopt or reject the various constraints of the discourse, they are
nevertheless required to navigate the leadership roles according to what they have available. It sets up the expectations for leadership and what student leaders might aspire to become—a hypothetical individual or an Ideal Type, but nevertheless dangerous (Spector, 2016). As Brown (2015b) explains:

the figure of homo oeconomicus is not simply illusory or ideological in its disavowal of the persons and practices that make and sustain human life. Rather, when homo oeconomicus becomes the governing truth, when it organizes law, conduct, policy, and everyday arrangements, the burdens upon and the invisibility of those excluded persons and practices are intensified. (p. 107)

Indeed, there are material consequences when everything is economized and subjects are merely considered human capital. As briefly noted in the previous chapter, the focus on the self in leadership constituted a conception of the leader aligned with individualist thinking and attitudes. The act of self-discovery and confession within leadership works similarly. “The truthful rendering into speech of who one is . . . is installed at the heart of contemporary procedures of individualization” (Rose, 1999, p. 244). Hence, the idea of self-work in combination with the everyone-can-be-a-leader discourse—assuring students that they can become a leader if they only work on themselves long enough and hard enough—engages students in individualist thinking at the expense of more collective, systemic analyses. Systemic analyses which consider the gendered, raced, ableist, and class implications of the very labor that neoliberalism effaces. ‘Those excluded persons’ Brown speaks of at the end of the quote are those whose labor is especially forgotten, specifically women and/or people of color’s, when individualism becomes the prevailing order and ‘being all one can be’ becomes the most important imperative.

In this way, Brown and McGee’s extensions of homo economicus highlight the gendered and racial implications of homo economicus, which is usually translated as ‘economic man’ with the understanding that it is a male actor mastering his destiny through sheer will and hard work.
As Brown (2015b) explains, “the generic individual who becomes responsibilized human capital, is, unsurprisingly, socially male and masculinist within a persistently gendered economic ontology and division of labor” (p. 107). In part, the notion of self-making as a masculine endeavor was made clear when women were finally given access to similar self-fulfillment opportunities. Women’s access to proximate self-making ventures exposed that the journey to self-mastery depended in large part on the unpaid and unacknowledged work of women and/or people or color (McGee, 2005). McGee (2005) asserts, “the idea of self-invention is invariably a conservative and masculinist notion because this idea of the self conceals the labors of care—often, but not always, the labor of women—in the making of other selves” (p. 23).

If leadership development cultivates homo economicus-expressimus and thus advances the notion of the self as autonomous and self-governing, then the discourses of leadership inevitably constitute a similar masculine subject (or masculinist leader subject position). Indeed, mastery of the self in leadership and the idea of leadership as a process or a journey simultaneously centers a masculinist (always ableist) heroic narrative (McGee, 2005). The self-making discourses central to much leadership discourse then also reflects masculinist notions of self that dismisses the care labor (usually performed by women) required for any one person to be able to embark on a journey to develop themselves (explore further in the next chapter in discussions on work/life balance). Hence, while initiatives to include more women and/or people of color within leadership might appear as though a process of equity or emancipation, the underlying metaphors and constituted subjectivity produce new constraints. In the next chapter I examine this notion further.
CHAPTER SIX: THERE IS NO LEAN IN FOR MEN

My dad was right. I'm a breeder, not a leader.
- Rebecca Bunch, Crazy Ex-Girlfriend

Lean In is the white-collar version of ‘Git-R-Done.’
- Jenny, The League

“You are the CEO of your life!,” read the bright red PowerPoint slide. At the end of a long, hot June day, a group of young women filed into a muggy and windowless classroom for their last workshop of the evening. Participants, young women in their early twenties and of varying races and ethnicities, had been attending session after session since the early morning. Exhaustion could be seen in their tired eyes, slumped shoulders, and the sluggish dragging of conference totes into the room. The final presenter, a middle-aged black woman, had an energetic demeanor, that although a bit out of place given the state of the group seemed to revitalize the women as they entered. It was the first day of the National Education for Women’s (NEW) Leadership conference at Freedom University—a “program designed to educate, empower, and encourage college women to become politically active and take on leadership roles.” While only a short time ago, programs like this one were practically non-existent, leadership development efforts that specifically target women and/or people of color are now in abundance. My role at the institute was not as a conference-goer, but as a researcher, observing the programs which seek to develop women college students into leaders. I intentionally selected a seat at the back of the room. Although I had introduced myself to the conference participants at the start of the day as a researcher and not an attendee, I still felt like (and probably appeared to
be) a spy—a social loafer, at the very least—in the back of the room, scribbling furiously in my notebook rather than participating in the discussions or group work.

The PowerPoint title caught my attention, of course. As someone interested in the discourses of neoliberalism, I recognized the corporatization of personal identity. Initially I thought the message to these young women might be that in order to be a leader, they needed to conceptualize themselves in market terms—as a product to fine tune for the workforce (see Chapter 5). But as soon as the thought crossed my mind, the presenter flipped the slide and revealed the session’s topic: Effective Presentation and Communications. While not the overt economization of human life, I was not yet convinced that this discussion would be any less problematic. Women’s appearance and communication styles have historically been laden with so much contempt, critique, and control within the US, that the very mention of the topic seems to always bring the feminist spikes on my back to attention—ready to fend off the impending gendered and misogynist discourse I expect to follow. Doing my best not to assume the worst, I listened intently to the speaker.

Her main advice to women was to make sure they were visible and heard. She said, “As a woman leader, in any room that you’re in, you have to get your voice in.” Continuing, she remarked that, “As a black woman, I have to be in the room and make myself seen. As young leaders, you will need to do the same.” “If you’re a leader, you can’t be shy,” she said. At the time, I could not help but think that it seemed like in order to be a woman leader you have to be something that closely resembles the wacky-waving-inflatable-arm-flailing-tube-man you see advertising car dealerships on the side of the road. Nevertheless, her presentation was funny and interactive, and she embodied what she seemed to be recommending for women leaders—a charming confidence, strong voice, good posture. She announced that she wanted to hear from
everyone in the room at least once, which I figured was another strategy to reiterate her point about speaking out and making yourself seen. Back and forth she chatted with the participants, and towards the end of the presentation she looked for some last comments on ways that women could participate more in workplace settings. She locked eyes with me at that moment and stopped. “Have you always been there?,” she said. The room let out a muffled laugh and my face turned red. “Yes,” I muttered. I stumbled over my words to quickly say “I’m not a participant, I’m just a resea—” but she interrupted me and asked what I thought about the initial question. I could not tell you how I answered. “Make sure you’re visible if you want to be a leader,” she said. “Have you always been there?” she asked me.

It would have been easy to write this chapter through recounting similar experiences or the ways in which women’s leadership workshops, popular press texts, or development models profess gendered (at minimum) or blatantly sexist (ad nauseam) rhetoric and advice. I could have explored the tagline of The Center for Creative Leadership’s Women’s Leadership Experience which coyly advertises that “Leadership is DIFFERENT for Women,” or I could have presented the advice from the women’s leadership text, Breaking into the Boys Club, which states that “[w]hile it is always appropriate to speak out confidently and with substance, women can sound shrill to the male ear, so there’s an invisible line that shouldn’t be crossed” (Shepard & Stimmmer, 2004, p. 34). Of course, highlighting pervasive sexism in leadership is necessary given the current political context. In a Trumpian culture where the election of a man who violates women’s bodies is more desirable than the presence of a woman’s body in the White House, there is even more work to be in the realm of gender and leadership than many have imagined. However, this chapter materialized from my attempt to avoid the low-hanging fruit. Studies of leadership that cover issues of sexism or gender discrimination are plentiful (e.g.,
American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2016; Eagley & Carli, 2007; Johnson, 2016). Rather than an exposure narrative on the misogynistic nature of women’s leadership discourse, in this chapter I instead play with the tensions that arise when we ask what ‘women’s leadership development’ tells us about ‘leadership development’ (or what I will refer to as ‘unisex leadership development’).12

Although all leadership development impinges on the individual in some way (think back to Chapter 5), when examining the differences between metaphors, texts, and development practices used between women’s and unisex leadership materials, women’s leadership offers specific and pointed gendered discourses which constitutes ‘women’ as the problem itself that must be fixed in order for leadership capabilities to be developed. To alter or reconcile their feminine wiles to become leaders, within women’s leadership development, women are tasked with addressing internal barriers and thus required to work on themselves in order to succeed. Interestingly, at the same time that women are seen as the problem, womanhood is seen as the solution to the crises of our contemporary moment. Current studies claim that women are more moral, democratic, or transformational leaders than men, and as such, women leaders are in high demand (Eagley & Carli, 2007; Kellogg Insight, 2013). Situated within this context, in this chapter I conclude that unlike the unisex leadership, women’s leadership discourse invokes a twofold responsibilization process for women that not only requires they save themselves through leadership, but also everyone else.

What follows in this chapter is less about detailing the ‘facts’ of women’s leadership, than it is about complicating the notion of empowerment through the women’s leadership movement, and to politicize women’s leadership development texts and practices within the university. In the sections that follow, I begin by briefly laying out the current context of
leadership development for women and/or people of color within the neoliberal university. I then turn to the broader context and discuss increased calls for women’s leadership under the assumption that women are more moral, transformative leaders. Next, I examine the notion of unisex leadership, noting the masculine structure which undergirds the supposedly gender-neutral discourse. I then trace the emergence of women’s leadership development and show the ways in which the focus on women’s leadership emerged alongside the burgeoning self-making culture of the latter half of the 20th century. In the next section, I move from broad analyses to close readings of two popular leadership texts that target college-aged students—*Lean In for Graduates* (2014) by Sheryl Sandberg (a women’s leadership text) and *The Student Leadership Challenge* (2014) by James Kouzes and Barry Posner (a unisex text)—to examine what they offer as tips, practices, or advice relative to one another. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the responsibilization of women leaders through examining the woman problem in combination with the discourses of women as moral saviors.

Before the analysis, it is important to note that while these responsibilization processes operate in various ways on all minoritized bodies, because of the archive I draw on, my focus in this chapter is mainly on women as my ‘group’ for analysis. However, women as a group should not imply a homogeneity of experiences in life or in leadership, and feminist scholars have made clear the limitations of such a modifier (Anzaldúa, 1987; Butler, 1990; Collins, 1986; Mohanty, 2003). Hence, intersectionality is important to keep in mind as ‘women’ are never just their gender, but also raced and classed. Yet, because of the underlying assumptions of not all, but most, leadership materials, it is important to mention that women’s leadership has mainly been concerned with white, middle-to-upper class, heterosexual women’s experiences, assimilating working class and women of color into a teleological narrative about purportedly shared or
similar experiences. While the analysis that follows gives attention to other markers of identity as often as possible, nevertheless it falls short of addressing the complex markers of identity in its attempt to primarily deconstruct the gendered logics that dominate leadership development.

Moreover, as will be seen in the next section, there is little literature or development materials which specifically target student women leaders. In the following discussion, I locate my analysis within the university when relevant, but do draw from materials beyond that context, which still infiltrate current discourses in higher education. The leadership archive materials used in this chapter include popular press women’s leadership literature, leadership organization’s websites and pamphlets, my own observations from attending a university-led women’s leadership conference, as well as several unisex popular press texts within my analysis for the purposes of comparison.

**Calling All Women: Developing ‘Diverse’ Leaders in the Neoliberal University**

As the image of ‘leader’ diversified over the latter half of the 20th century to represent those other than white and male, initiatives within the university to develop women and/or students of color as leaders also proliferated. Throughout the 1980s a series of conferences at Bowie State University were held for student leaders from historically black institutions. In 1984 the National Women Student Leaders conference began and has grown to be the largest conference for women student leaders currently (now renamed the National Conference for College Women Student Leaders). Today, ‘diverse’ student leaders can attend the National Student Leadership Diversity Convention, and at most Ivy League universities, such as Harvard or Yale, there are pay-to-play certification programs for women and/or people of color (both enrolled students and otherwise). For instance, Cornell’s SC Johnson College of Business offers
a Women in Leadership online non-degree certification program, with classes on how to better negotiate, navigate the double bind, and “outsmart” work/life balance.¹³

Many universities have also opted for leadership programming or initiatives that specifically target university women faculty and staff on campus. For example, the National Science Foundation’s ADVANCE program exists on over 150 universities across the United States with the express intention of recruiting, retaining, and developing the leadership of women faculty in the STEM fields (Debebe, Anderson, Bilimoria, & Vinnicombe, 2016). Providing workshops and guest speakers on campuses, Freedom University even hosted an ADVANCE development session titled “Women Leading: Turning Bias into Opportunity.” In terms of developing student women leaders, campus initiatives have increased over time, but are still much less abundant than those for faculty and staff. Most university programs that target the development of student women leaders appear as on-campus conferences. While each university may hold its own specific initiative for developing women’s leadership on campus, the National Education for Women’s (NEW) Leadership conference, and The United Collegiate Women’s Leadership Conference (UCWLC) are among the most popular programs universities can choose to host.

The Morality Clause

Although there are a variety of reasons put forth both inside and outside of academia as to why women need to become leaders, one of the most pronounced at the moment is the notion that women are not only just as good as male leaders, but are in fact better leaders than men because they have been found to approach leadership in ways that are more democratic, transformational, inclusive, and/or socially-just. It is worth taking a short detour here to discuss this notion further before addressing the differences between women’s leadership and unisex
literature because it illuminates an initial responsibilization process for women that is directly tied to gendered, essentialist notions of womanhood, but also the rearticulations of labor under neoliberalism.

Contemporary discussions of leadership usually invoke a state of turbulence or crisis, par for the neoliberal era. Indeed, according to scholars of neoliberalism the evocation of different crises is a characteristic of capitalism overall and how neoliberal ideology, in part, emerged and continues to perpetuate itself across the world (see Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007; Di Leo, 2017; Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007; Peck, 2010; Steger & Roy, 2010). Milton Friedman, one of the main economists credited with creating neoliberal economics, stated “Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. . . . Our basic function [is] to develop alternatives to existing policies” (as cited in Klinenberg, 2007, para. 2). Those alternatives often being radical deregulation, increased privatization, and the elimination of the welfare state. Interestingly, leadership has been framed as both the problem and the solution to the turbulent times we face. With growing inequality, economic recessions, global warming, the threat of North Korea, and continual wars and violence, a recent survey by the World Economic Forum revealed that 86% of respondents believe we are suffering from a global leadership crisis (Shahid, 2014). And, no doubt that with Donald Trump in office this discourse of a crisis, of and in, leadership is all the more abundant and necessary. However, just as quickly as a failure of leadership is pointed to as the cause of turbulent times, it is also made the solution. Guthrie, Jones, Osteen, and Hu (2013) state that because of “economic gridlock and racial inequality to political gridlock in this country’s capital, a new type of leadership is needed to reclaim the promise of the United States” (p. 3). Should one feel compelled to respond to such calls, the leadership industry, of course, has
you covered…for a price. For instance, Harvard offers a program called Leadership in Crisis: Preparation and Performance, which advertises: “Natural disasters. Infrastructure failures. Major technology breaches. Terrorist attacks. Public health emergencies. These are the kinds of extraordinary challenges that leaders like you face every day. Do you feel fully prepared to handle all of them?”

It seems times are turbulent and we need leaders who can handle the crises of our contemporary moment.

Within the university, the current context of crises, perceived or actual, are partly how most calls for student leadership development begin. With an education system still reeling from the Bush Administration’s No Child Left Behind Act and the similarly competitive, quantitatively-oriented Race To The Top, implemented by the Obama Administration, higher education and college students are often centered as a means to maintain global dominance within the ever-changing political order. For example, value is now placed on majors and areas of study that can keep the US competitive in the global market and framed as potential nation-savers, such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. In Leadership for a Better World the authors declare that, “Nearly every college or university acknowledges that its graduates can, will, and indeed, must be active leaders in their professions, their communities, and their world. Colleges expect their graduates to make this a better world” (Komives & Wagner, 2009, p. XV). Even the First Step program relies on the same crisis rhetoric: “Our world is increasingly complex and difficult to navigate for those without solid preparation . . . The world needs you. Climate change, natural resource depletion, social injustice . . . current and future leaders have some big problems to solve.” Thus, the American university has become a central site for the production and creation of future leaders, or ‘change agents.’
Turning to the history of leadership discourse, it is fitting that leadership would be seen as a way to solve contemporary crises. With the split from management, ‘leadership’ took on an ethical as well as a moral responsibility that management discourse never had, nor necessarily needed, to posses. ‘Leadership’ was understood as a ‘transformational’ act that could have a real effect on changing individuals and organizations. Influenced by previous theories of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002), the transformational element is credited to James MacGregor Burns’ (1978) theory of Transformational Leadership, which focused on the ethical and moral responsibilities involved in leadership, particularly “raising the morality of others” (Northouse, 2007, p. 177). Since the release of Burns’ Leadership, transformational leadership has been the favorite of leadership development gurus both in and outside of academia. Later, Bennis and Nanus in their 1985 book Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge would contribute their take on transformational leadership and create the often-used phrase: “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing” (p. 20). Whereas management was seen to merely maintain the status quo, leaders “intend real change” (Rose, 1991, p. 151).

Indeed, the leader/manager split in conjunction with calls for increased diversity over the latter half of the 20th century coalesced to form a discourse of leadership that emphasized ethical, moral, and personal practices that ‘management’ did not encompass. Add to this, the assumption that women are inherently good as well, and you find the apotheotic savior of the 21st century in women leaders.

Only women leaders can save us now. While there are several studies which propose that gender does not determine a leader’s effectiveness (Hyde, 2014; Posner & Brodsky, 1994), the majority of the literature acknowledges that women still experience a far different reality from men either in terms of access or in terms of performing their leaderly duties. And of those
that acknowledge gender, many argue that women are not just capable leaders, but are actually more suited to the current crises-ridden moment than men. For example, in a study by Perkins, Phillips, and Pearce, the researchers found that women leaders outperformed men in organizations with high internal conflict and ambiguity (Kellogg Insight, 2013). During an interview on the study, the researchers made clear that they were not suggesting that women were better leaders than men, but rather that some of the characteristics of women leaders were often more advantageous in organizational contexts during times of crisis (Kellogg Insight, 2013). It is that “collaborative instinct we see women bring to the table [that] is very powerful,” said one of the researchers (Kellogg Insight, 2013). Similarly, a study by Anzia and Berry (2011) showed that women in Congress were often more productive than men, “secur[ing] roughly 9 percent more in federal funding for their districts than their male colleagues did, and they introduced about twice as many bills” (as cited in AAUW, 2016, p. 13).

The positive performance of women, aligned with Perkins, Phillips, and Pearce study that women are more ‘collaborative,’ is often attributed to women being more naturally democratic or transformational leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Transformational leadership, as described earlier, is a type of leadership which centers morality and ethics in leader behavior. In a meta-analysis that drew on over 45 studies which looked at transformational leadership styles by gender, women rated higher as transformational leaders than men, especially in the areas of encouragement and support (Eagly & Carli, 2007). As transformational leaders then, women leaders have also been ‘found’ to be more humane, and socially progressive in terms of the practices and polices they bring into the workforce or position. The 2016 AAUW report reviews some of the current research on the subject:

For workers, women’s leadership may offer another benefit: A study of businesses operating during the Great Recession found that female CEOs were less likely than their
male peers to lay off staff. The difference was significant; workforce reductions were more than twice as frequent at male-owned firms as at female-owned firms (14 percent vs. 6 percent), and more workers were affected (Matsa & Miller, 2014). . . . Other research shows that firms with more women in leadership roles may have smaller pay gaps between men and women who have similar work experience and arrive at the firm under similar circumstances (Tate & Yang, 2015). And the more women on the board, the more likely a firm will adopt a full range of LGBT-friendly policies (Cook & Glass, 2016). (p. 3)

Indeed, it seems that women are particularly equipped to handle the challenges that our turbulent times present in ways which are more inclusive and kind. As the 2017 pamphlet from the Omega Women’s Leadership Center institute insists: “If ever there's a time for women across the globe to gather, share ideas, build community, and foster resilience, it is now.” Today calls for more women leaders are ubiquitous (Dearman, 2013; Young, 2016) and programs and initiatives to develop women’s leadership numerous.

Within the university, though, the idea that anyone can be a leader and that most leadership programs or texts are ‘gender neutral’ often obscures the importance of developing women students specifically. While today there are few who would suggest gender does not matter in leadership, more often than not, college women are not separated from the general, unisex leadership development programming which pervades the campus leadership scene today. However, in the next section the suggestion that unisex leadership is, in fact, unisex, will be examined further. Following that is a discussion on the emergence of ‘women’s’ leadership development. Although women leaders are in high demand for their transformational styles, the current shape of women’s leadership development shows that such initiatives might be mere lip-service. Women leaders still endure multiple barriers, and yet forms of redress are rooted in individualism, neoliberal notions of selfhood.

‘Unisex’ and Women’s Leadership Development
Is Unisex Really Unisex?

If the current pervasive mantra is that ‘everyone can be a leader,’ then it makes sense that there would be both supposedly unisex leadership development initiatives (as gender should not matter if everyone can lead), and also women’s leadership development (since there are now opportunities for historically excluded groups to access these positions). While modern unisex leadership development materials were never created exclusively for men, men as the general audience were expected, and male scholars and writers have pervaded the field since its inception. Accordingly, from the characteristics we assign to leaders, to the way we perceive certain people as leaders, to basic promotion or pay for those who we deem leaders, men and masculinity always seem to be valued over women and femininity within leadership discourse (AAUW, 2016).

The gendered stereotypes associated with leadership are well documented, as are the ways in which we see leadership as a masculinist undertaking or social role (see AAUW, 2016; Allan, Gordon, & Iverson, 2006). Historically, from Niccolò Machiavelli’s The Prince in the 16th century to Carlyle’s Great Man theories in the 1840s, leaders have been understood as individual, heroic men, on a journey to self-discovery and who commit acts of greatness. Traits associated with traditional notions of masculinity such as independence, aggression, competitiveness, rationality, and dominance, have come to represent the characteristics of a good leader well into the 21st century. For instance, in 2006, after reviewing over 100 articles written on leadership within The Chronicle of Higher Education, Allan, Gordon, and Iverson found masculinity to be one of the dominant discourses. “[A]rrogant,” “dominating,” “loath to compromise,” and “unprincipled but powerful” were among the common descriptors of leadership they found within the publication (Allan, Gordon, & Iverson, 2006, p. 51). Similarly,
when conducting a meta-analysis of 69 studies that examined masculine/feminine stereotypes in leadership, researchers concluded that, overall, stereotypes of leaders are “decidedly masculine” (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011, p. 634). Because of the conflation of masculinity and leadership, and the cultural conflation of gender and sex (masculinity = male), men are often more readily and easily seen as the true or ‘natural born’ leaders. That man is a natural born leader was not lost at Freedom University as either (see Figure 4).

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 4.** A flyer created by a Student Affairs office at Freedom University to advertise a ‘No Shave November’ program.

Because gender is a performance (Butler, 1990; Kimmel, 2011; West & Zimmerman, 1987), we have seen many women leaders adopt a more masculine approach to demonstrate their leadership abilities. In part, this is because leadership as a masculine discourse operates within institutions or organizations that are also male-identified (Kimmel, 2011). Organizations, argue Prasad and Mills (1997), are “extraordinarily monocultural entities” (p. 15). Homogeneity is seen as a way to increase proficiency, often propelled by discussions surrounding ‘cultural fit’ (Spector, 2016). For example, in *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), Rosabeth Moss
Kanter discusses how organizational positions “carry characteristic images of the kinds of people that should occupy them” (p. 250). Regardless if men or women held those positions, they were structured by masculine principles and people who could not perform accordingly were outcast or considered to have failed in their organizational role (Kanter, 1977). Hence, women often adopt masculine norms of leadership in order to succeed in a male-dominated work environment. Although arguably a survival strategy to advance and/or gain visibility within a male-identified culture, when women take on masculine expressions they are often viewed as imposters (Allan, Gordon, & Iverson, 2006) or incite discomfort in their constituents for performing outside feminine gender norms (Kimmel, 2011). In fact, one study showed that women, more than men, were uncomfortable with, and more critical of, women leaders (Cohn & Livingston, 2016). In this sense, women in leadership often face a double bind: perform femininely and be taken less seriously as a leader, or adopt a masculine performance and be ridiculed as too aggressive or a fraud. “This reality points to an underlying truth: think leader, think white male” (Spector, 2016, p. 118).

Despite maintaining many of the same practices or metaphors from the past, unisex leadership programming and texts insist that they are gender-neutral (if they happen to mention gender at all). Resting their argument, in part, on the basis that they encourage self-development rather than imposing particular skills or leadership behaviors—those which research has shown over the last 30 years to be masculinist in nature or logic. According to Mickie McGee (2005), this requires a lot of women to have to read such texts with a “split consciousness” (p. 45).

Discussing self-help literature, McGee (2005) states:

However, women reading the ostensibly ‘unisex,’ one-size-fits-all literature of self-improvement may find themselves reading with a split consciousness or through a masculine or dominant-culture lens, wherein the experience of men is understood to be
the norm—the human—while the experience of women (or any subordinate) group is perceived as the exception, as other. (p. 45)

The same can be said of leadership. Although called unisex literature, the majority of mainstream leadership texts are written by men, and the image of a ‘leader’ still remains male-identified.

With little literature that identifies itself as ‘leadership for men’ or ‘men’s leadership,’ women’s leadership (by its mere existence, let alone advice) reinforces the notion that just ‘leadership’ is a masculinist territory, despite its supposed gender neutral, universalist approach. Critical scholars have demonstrated how when certain identifiers are added to some descriptors but not others, the absent presence illustrates underlying cultural or social expectations (Katz, 1999; Kimmel, 2011; Spector, 2016). For example, although school shootings are overwhelmingly carried out by men, genderless headlines to describe the epidemic, such as ‘kids killing kids,’ are often displayed over a more accurate description like ‘boys killing kids’ (Katz, 1999). Because cultural expectations regarding masculinity and men assume real men are always in control and solve their problems through violence, the fact that most homicides or violent acts are committed by men goes unnamed. On the other hand, when women engage in the same behavior (something perceived of as outside the norms of femininity), gender is made central to the discussion, evident in television shows such as Deadly Women or Women Who Kill. Hence, our language expresses and reflects normalized gender expectations as they simultaneously mask privilege—keeping dominant groups invisible in the discussion. Bert Spector (2016) explains this concept further in relation to leadership:

Labels locate individuals and groups within a power and status hierarchy. When we refer to a “black CEO” or a “woman CEO,” our language falls into the same trap. White male CEOs are simply “CEOs,” thought to be “unraced” or “ungendered” and therefore universal. (p. 121)
In other words, if you have ‘women's leadership’ but not ‘men's leadership,’ then just ‘leadership’ signals leadership as coded white and male or for men. Disappearing ‘men’ from leadership does not work to create a more universal and applicable leadership discourse, as might be intended. Instead, leadership development discourse reifies and normalizes masculinist—and by extension capitalist and White—ways of being under the banner of just ‘good leadership.’

**From “Are Women Executives People?” to How Do We Get More Women Executives?**

Contemporary discussions on women’s leadership emerged alongside the Civil Rights and Women’s movements of the 1960s and 70s. With different conceptualizations of work materializing, women (particularly white middle-class women) began entering the workforce in high numbers not simply to help with the family’s finances, but from the position of personal choice and growth (McGee, 2005). The notion that women should or could pursue self-satisfaction outside of the domestic sphere circulated in both feminist and popular press texts at the time, such as Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962), respectively (McGee, 2005). Work now was “reimagined, not as deprivation for which one ought to be compensated but as a means of expressing oneself, as a source of identity and personal fulfillment” (McGee, 2005, p. 42).

Yet, despite the ostensible newfound freedom to work by choice, the barriers women faced in the workforce and leadership positions did not go unmentioned. In 1965, Bowman, Worthy, and Greyser published their results from a survey in the *Harvard Business Review* that made clear the pervasive disdain for women leaders, appropriately titled “Are Women Executives People?” Of the 2,000 US executives surveyed at the time, only 27% said they would feel comfortable working for a woman, many self-identified as “anti-woman executives,” and the resounding opinion seemed to be that women were “a special kind of people with a
special place – which is not in the ranks of management” (Spector, 2016, p. 126). Amidst the changes in gender representation in leadership roles, several landmark texts elucidated the masculinist and patriarchal structure of the business world and leadership, such as Kanter’s (1977) *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Virginia Schein’s “Think Manager, Think Men” (1973), and the 1984 *Adweek* article where Gay Bryant introduced the term “glass ceiling.” By 1985, a follow-up study to *Harvard Business Review*’s original 1965 poll indicated some change in the perceptions of women leaders. Now 47% of respondents, up from 27% in the original survey, stated that they would feel comfortable working for a woman, and the majority of men reported a willingness to accept women as competent equals and colleagues (Spector, 2016).

Although the follow-up survey was presented as an example of the progress woman had made in leadership and management, only 21% of men in 1985 stated they believed *other* men would feel comfortable working for a woman, and more than half of both men and women felt that women must be exceptional to succeed in the business community (Spector, 2016).

The underlying cultural misogyny over the latter half of the 20th century remains today and has contributed to the lack of representation of women in leadership positions. In the business arena, Justin Wolfers (2015) pointed out that there are still more men named John running large companies than there are women CEOs. As of 2015, only 5% of S&P 500 companies had women CEOs (Catalyst, 2015). Within the realm of politics in the US, women make up only 12% of governors, 25% of state legislators, and 19% of U.S. congress (AAUW, 2016). And, let’s not also forget “of course, the percentage of female presidents in U.S. history is currently zero” (AAUW, 2016, p. 11). The representation of women’s leadership within the university is similar to that outside of the academy. Today, women students earn more degrees than men in the institution, but remain underrepresented as faculty in tenure or full professorship
positions (AAUW, 2016; Allan, 2011). In fact, the more prestigious and well-paid the position, the less women you will find, even outside of faculty positions, as men outnumber women among newly appointed deans, provosts, and presidents (AAUW, 2016; Hammond, 2015; Johnson, 2016). At the top, women hold only 27% of presidencies across all higher education institutions (Johnson, 2016). Women of color have been found to outnumber men of color in lower-ranking faculty positions, but when it comes to full professorship, men of color still hold more positions (Johnson, 2016). Besides rank, the wage gap within academia has only slightly improved in aggregate figures. Regardless of academic rank, men make more money than women, out-earning them by $13,616 at public institutions and $17,843 at private institutions (Johnson, 2016). Hence, although the Girl Power Movement of the 1990s, the Alpha Girls (Kindlon, 2006) of the new millennium, and Sandberg’s (2013) Lean In, heralded as the ‘feminist manifesto’ of the 21st century, may lead some to believe that women have overcome the barriers and negative perceptions of women’s leadership, men are still much more likely than women to hold leadership positions or be recognized as leaders.

Currently, external barriers to explain the lack of women in leadership positions often include sex discrimination, sexual harassment, lack of networking opportunities for women, and implicit bias (AAUW, 2016; Bigelow, Lundmark, Parks, & Wuebker, 2014; Ratcliff, Vescio, & Dahl, 2015). Internal barriers often note stereotype threat, pressures of work/life balance, self-selecting out of leadership roles, and the gender socialization of women to be modest, nice, and unassuming—traits not always valued within the workforce or thought of as a personal obstacle to overcome (AAUW, 2016; Eagley & Sczesny, 2009; Enloe, 2004; Flammang, 1997). The solutions offered to solve the lack of women leaders usually involve both institutional and personal (for the women themselves) transformation. To combat external barriers, most
advocates of women’s leadership suggest that companies provide more leadership training for women, while others prescribe gender quotas, changes in hiring methods or promotion qualifications, more family friendly policies, or connecting women to mentors (AAUW, 2016). However, while there is an acknowledgment that external barriers must be challenged, leadership research and development materials for women almost invariably focus on addressing women’s internal barriers and how they, themselves, can overcome them. As such, a growing industry aiming to develop women’s leadership through addressing women’s internal impediments continues to emerge both in and outside of academia. For example, the Omega Women’s Leadership Center provides over 12 intensive institutes on topics from public speaking to emotional courage for women. Books on overcoming internal barriers are also numerous with titles like *Leading from the Front: No-Excuse Leadership Tactics for Women* (Lynch & Morgan, 2006) and *Nice Girls Don’t Get the Corner Office* (Frankel, 2004). Amongst the most popular has been Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013) which has sold over 2.25 million copies and inspired more than 33,000 Lean In Circles in over 150 countries across the world.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprising, the massive amount of research and popular literature on women’s leadership has not been matched by other facets of identity. For discussions on race and leadership, the majority of texts focus on black women, such as Carter’s (2007) *Double Outsiders: How Women of Color Can Succeed in Corporate America* or Brown, Haygood, McLean, and Burt-Murray’s (2010) *The Little Black Book of Success: Laws of Leadership for Black Women.* In fact, *The Talented Tenth* by W. E. B. Du Bois, published in 1903, remains one of the only and most popular texts to discuss race and leadership. Overall, race has been almost completely left out of contemporary discussions on leadership. Texts or
training programs for leaders of the LGBTQIA+ community or those with disabilities is similarly scant. As for intersectionality, there exists little discussion of the topic in leadership discourse, though recently there have been more calls for leadership development programs to adopt intersectional efforts to train ‘diverse’ leaders (Debebe et al., 2016; Sugiyama, Cavanagh, Esch, Bilimoria, & Brown, 2016). So why the stark contrast in the amount of attention between women and other historically marginalized within leadership discourse? While a thorough answer to that question is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth pointing out that the overwhelming attention on (white) women over other identities is not necessarily unique to leadership, but rather indicative of a US cultural context where intersectionality is continuously ignored and racial hierarchies are often maintained through gender relations (Elkholy, n.d.; Frankenberg, 1993; Ware, 2015).

I am woman, hear me lead. The turn to internal adjustments within women’s leadership materials makes sense given the overall shape of the leadership industry and the neoliberal landscape of self-making and responsibilization. Prior to the 1960s, endeavors of self-making were primarily a masculinist undertaking (McGee, 2005). Importantly, the notion of the self-made man occluded the fact that no one succeeded without the labor and support of others, specifically the care work and unpaid labor of women. Indeed, “[t]he myth of the self-made man relied, to a very great extent, on the suppression of women’s ambitions for the sake of those of their husbands and children” (McGee, 2005, p. 37). The changing gender structure of the public and private spheres during the 1960s and 70s transformed the availability of women’s exploited labor for the self-made man, and subsequently changed the targets of self-making discourses altogether.
As the workforce has continued to diversify and women became more ‘empowered,’ the leadership industry expanded its effort to include women, primarily, but also people of color, within the self-making revolution of the new epoch. In the 1970s, women’s self-help literature encouraged them to apply market principles to their lives to “avoid the newly constructed pathology of ‘codependence’” (McGee, 2005, p. 50). By the 1980s it was the “winning woman” trope that pervaded the literature and “suggested that women had the right to self-fulfillment—and should ‘win’—not only in work but also in expressing their sexuality” (McGee, 2005, p. 83).

While older masculinist models of ‘coming out on top’ were still popular, women’s self-making tools reframed the competition to be not against others, but rather against one’s self, evidenced in rhetoric like ‘be your best self’ or the imperative to make one’s life ‘a work of art’ (McGee, 2005).

The resignification of feminist politics under neoliberalism made work the epicenter of equality (hence the second wave feminism’s focus on equal pay and employment opportunities). The emergence of women’s leadership discourse makes sense alongside this new form of liberalism offered to women that promised the freedom to work and opportunities for advancement through dedication and commitment to one’s career. Indeed, the idea of more women entering the workforce, becoming leaders with various institutions, worked well to introduce more bodies into the web of exploitation—where now once-housewives could join the ranks of women of color and unmarried women in low waged work and service jobs (Fraser, 2013; McRobbie, 2009). As Fraser (2013) explains:

Neoliberalism turns a sow's ear into a silk purse by elaborating a narrative of female empowerment. Invoking the feminist critique of the family wage to justify exploitation, it harnesses the dream of women's emancipation to the engine of capital accumulation. (para. 7)
The reorganization of labor, coupled with the imperative to create one’s self through work constituted a female subject who was, herself, responsible for determining her successes or failures—a shining responsibilized subject of the new millennium. The focus on self-making in combination with rugged individualism in a neoliberal context makes leadership development for women almost compulsory. “Women are both permitted and expected to develop themselves in occupations outside the home and family—to ‘realize themselves’ in work outside the domestic sphere” (McGee, 2005, p. 8). Although women’s leadership development is situated as a practice of empowerment or equality, as will be seen in the next section, the differences between unisex and women’s leadership discourse re-center and normalize masculine/male ways of leading and self-development as they simultaneously responsibilize women to fix their ‘woman-ness’ in order to be leaders.

**Women for the Fixing**

In the next sections, I focus on two popular leadership development texts for college-aged students to examine the tensions which emerge when we compare unisex leadership discourse to women’s leadership discourse. Not surprisingly, women’s leadership texts include topics or issues not typically found in the unisex literature. A quick survey of table of contents in popular women’s texts and you find chapters titled “Sit at the Table,” “Learn the Rules, Play the Game: Navigate the Politics of Your Corporate Culture,” and “Dancing Around Pregnancy.” Compare that to the unisex literature with chapters like “Leaders Need a Following,” “Investing in Your Strengths,” and “Envision the Future” and the differences in focus and discussion quickly emerge. Ostensibly, since women’s leadership texts are aimed at women while unisex texts are said not to be gender-specific, it might not be immediately alarming that the texts do differ in some respects. However, to accept such differences and overlook the impact such materials have
on our subjectivity is, as I attempt to show in this section, shortsighted. Rather, these ‘expected’ differences in topic are anything but natural and instead illuminative of the underlying gendered logics that come to inform both women’s and unisex leadership development. Within these two texts, I specifically examine the discussions surrounding (1) work/life balance, (2) mentorship, and (3) techniques of leader preparedness to see how these very common discourses in leadership development differ and thus constitute ‘women’ as the underlying issue to be remedied within leadership development.

Because women’s leadership development books specifically for college-aged women is limited, Sheryl Sandberg’s (2014) Lean In for Graduates (LIG) serves as my ‘women’s’ text. In fact, it was the only popular press leadership development text I could find that spoke to this population, and even it is directed toward those who just graduated college rather than those still enrolled. As an extension of the original bestseller, Lean In (2013), LIG not only includes the original 11 chapters, but also an additional six chapters by other contributors, and 12 inspirational short stories intended to connect with recent university graduates in their time of transition. Launching this new version of the book, The Lean In Organization planned to facilitate Lean In Circle discussion groups on over 150 campuses in 17 different countries to promote the text. In an interview with USA Today, Sandberg commented, “The energy around college campuses is exciting—it gives us hope for the future . . . We are harnessing the power of strong groups” (Swartz, 2014, para. 6). Interestingly, LIG has been criticized as an apologist’s edition of Lean In where new chapters are “slapped onto the back of the original text in a covering-the-bases fashion” (Fitzsimons, 2014, para. 5). The new chapters conveniently address earlier criticisms of Sandberg’s corporate feminist model received after the release of Lean In (see hooks, 2013). For instance, Ursula Burns, the African-American CEO of Xerox, and
Mellody Hobson, President of Ariel Investments, present a chapter on race, while Kunal Modi, a consultant at McKinsey & Co., adds a chapter on how men can ‘lean in.’

Now in its second edition, *The Student Leadership Challenge* (SLC) by James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2014) is my unisex text for comparison. While the SLC is their nod to the college market, Kouzes and Posner are both recognized as experts in the field of leadership development broadly and have authored numerous leadership books including their most popular, *The Leadership Challenge* (originally published in 1990 and now in its sixth edition). Like *The Leadership Challenge*, the student-friendly text includes the author’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, which include: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. The authors make clear in the introduction to the SLC that their book is for everyone because “the effective use of the Five Practices is not affected by gender, ethnicity, age, or year in school. To sum it all up: what matters as a leader is how you behave” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 17). The second edition of the SLC includes an access code to the Student Leadership Practices Inventory Self Online assessment (Student LPI) which calculates a student’s leadership skills based on the Five Practices. Describing the Student LPI, Kouzes and Posner (2014) declare, “this powerful leadership development model approaches leadership as a measurable, learnable, and teachable set of behaviors, because everyone can be a leader— whether in a designated leadership role or not” (p. IX).

**Work/Life Balance: Navigating Verse Integrating**

From examining the two texts, several differences in discussion are instantly apparent. The first is their treatment of work/life balance (which has commonly come to mean balancing work and *parental* expectations). What may be the single most popular discussion in women’s
leadership development today, work/life balance is the topic of entire chapters within women’s leadership literature, and every women’s leadership conference or workshop I attended while gathering data for this project touched on the subject. For instance, work/life balance was a primary topic of discussion at a recent Lean In workshop I attended, hosted by Freedom University’s First Lady. There, we brainstormed films and television shows that depicted women successfully navigating work/life duties (Parks and Recreation and 30 Rock were among the few that the group agreed upon), and debriefed questions like “Do you agree that ‘done is better than perfect?’” Within LIG, the topic of work/life balance is prominent, though less explicitly addressed as in other women’s leadership texts. Sandberg instead discusses the importance of finding the right (male) partner to split responsibilities with, and the importance of not letting fear stop you from succeeding in work and life. She states that “Fear is at the root of so many of the barriers that women face,” especially the “holy trinity of fear: the fear of being a bad mother/wife/daughter” (Sandberg, 2014, p. 31). Indeed, not letting fear control them appears to be Sandberg’s answer to how women can solve the work/life dilemma. “Without fear, women can pursue professional success and personal fulfillment—and freely choose one, or the other, or both” (Sandberg, 2014, p. 31).

Within the SLC, I could not find one mention of work/life balance or any explicit reference to having to navigate both work and life responsibilities. Instead, the notion of engaging in leadership on behalf of, or inspired by, one’s family was more common. In the SLC, as Kouzes and Posner (2014) recount the stories of “everyday student leaders” such as Elliese, Angel, or Christian, we come to learn how their family situation or family support guided them on their leadership experience (p. 260). This is also very common in unisex texts on Authentic Leadership where self-reflecting on one’s life story and interaction with family members is
heralded as the first step toward true authenticity (George, 2007). Family also comes up in terms of relationship or team building, where Kouzes and Posner (2014) encourage leaders to build “spirited and cohesive teams, teams that feel like family” (p. 163). Perhaps it could be argued that work/life balance is not mentioned in the SLC because the target audience is students who are assumed to be younger and perhaps not worried about the struggles that come when one tries to raise a family at the same time they are navigating the workplace. However, the work/life balance discussion is absent from much of the unisex leadership development materials beyond those that just target college students (Sugiyama et al., 2016). Not one time did I hear a work/life balance discussion come up in any of the unisex leadership trainings I attended at Freedom University as well.

Interestingly, if a discussion of work/life balance is explicit in a unisex text, then often the authors are suggesting that the two spheres become integrated. For example, in Discovering the Leader in You, King, Altman, and Lee (2011) reject the idea that you can have an evenly balanced work/life split, seeing it as “unrealistic” (p. 126) and instead suggest that leaders should move beyond the binary between work and life and “integrate” the two (p. 140). They state “[b]ring the kids to work one day. Make personal calls at work during lunch hour, or combine paid work trips with personal vacations” (King, Altman, & Lee, 2011, p. 140). The authors even quip that they wrote most of Discovering the Leader in You while at home. Similarly, Bill George (2007) suggests that a step toward becoming an authentic leader is to “hav[e] a fully integrated life—your work life, your home life, your personal life, and your community life. That will make you a better leader if you can achieve an equilibrium” (para. 31).

Certainly, within a neoliberal context such work/life discussions reify market logics and the further conflation of our personal selves with our work lives. While the propensity to make
one’s life meaningful through work is not a new phenomenon, the encouragement to entangle the
two spheres is amplified within the neoliberal era that disappears the potentially exploitive logics
that come with ‘becoming’ one’s work. Enmeshing our personal, affective selves with our work
makes it difficult, for example, to step away from work—to not check emails, work on
weekends, or be available for work-related tasks 24 hours of everyday. Melissa Greg (2011)
refers to the propensity to live a life of work as the “presence bleed,” describing “the sense of
responsibility workers feel in making themselves ready and willing to work beyond paid hours,
but also captures the feeling of anxiety that arises in jobs that involve a never-ending schedule of
tasks that must be fulfilled” (p. 2).

However, the proposal to integrate work and life spheres within unisex leadership
development also illustrates the gendered nature of neoliberal reformulations of labor.
Suggestions to dissolve the work/life split assumes that work and life are things that have ever
actually been split to begin with, and can then be recombined by choice. This ignores women’s
domestic labor which does not always have a clear split between work and life and that is
sometimes performed with little choice. This is especially true for women of color who, before it
became a fashionable ‘choice,’ have always had to work and often perform childrearing duties or
care work for other, white families. Furthermore, the instruction of women’s leadership texts to
evaluate and improve work/life balance manages to place the responsibility of finding said
balance onto the individual woman as it simultaneously removes all responsibility from the
corporation or employer (as well as the woman’s partner, if present). For instance, as the
expected caregivers, if a woman becomes pregnant, it is understood to be her responsibility to
cobble together a hodgepodge of vacation time, sick leave, or even unpaid leave, all the while
having to manage the worry of being replaced while absent. The fact that the US remains one of
the only developed countries without mandated paid maternity or parental leave, or that employers might have unrealistic workloads, are rarely questioned when the attention is shifted to individual resourcefulness and responsibility. Even Sandberg (2014) in LIG, relies on such neoliberal and individualizing discourses when she provides the anecdotal story of how she took matters into her own hands by demanding her boss provide her with a closer parking spot to her building while pregnant. Sandberg’s message is that it is each women’s ‘choice’ and ‘responsibility’ to ‘lean in’ to the corporate culture, and although she admits such climates are usually male-dominated, she nevertheless suggests that mothers must themselves bear the individual burden of asking for better services from their employer (hooks, 2013).

Undoubtedly, work/life balance is an important topic and speaks to the (oppressive) complex web that women work and wish to parent must navigate. However, the glaring absence of the topic in one form of leadership development in contrast to the overwhelming focus in the other, is indicative of not only the gendered nature of leadership materials (i.e., that unisex is slanted towards men’s experience), but also the continual axiomatic designation of women as primary caregivers within the household. If unisex leadership development continues to ignore the topic, and men only attend those programs and not women’s leadership development (which often is the case), then leadership development becomes yet another avenue within which women are re-responsibilized for childrearing in addition to work expectations, while men’s share in the same labor is left undiscussed and thus unchecked.

The Perpetual Mentee

A second notable difference worth mentioning is the notion of mentorship within women’s versus unisex leadership. Within women’s leadership, this is another extremely popular subject. For example, The NEW Leadership conference encouraged the mentorship relationship,
and as part of the conference, the women participants were invited to a formal dinner to practice their networking skills with local women public officials. In LIG, Sandberg (2014) acknowledges the popularity of such discussions as well, saying “For the past decade, talk of mentorship and sponsorship has been topic number one at any women’s career seminar” (p. 82). Interestingly, at the same time that she advises women to find a mentor, she begins her chapter, “Are You My Mentor?”, by chastising the women that come up to her after public appearances and ask her that very question. On par with the underlying heterosexism of the entire text, Sandberg (2014) states “I realized that searching for a mentor has become the professional equivalent of waiting for Prince Charming” (p. 84). Throughout the chapter Sandberg (2014) speaks to the importance of mentorship and sponsorship (a rather uncommon term in women’s leadership literature) with mentors being people who advise and sponsors being those who “use their influence to advocate” for others. Sandberg (2014) advises women not to treat their mentor like a therapist, but to make sure the relationship is mutually beneficial, and then describes how women might navigate finding mentors when often women are often skipped over for these kinds of relationships. She also suggests that men become actively involved in the mentorship process—not finding mentors but serving as them for aspiring women leaders. “It’s wonderful when senior men mentor women,” she says (Sandberg, 2014, p. 90). “Any male leader who is serious about moving toward a more equal world can make this a priority. . . It should be a badge of honor” (Sandberg, 2014, p. 90). Her overall description of mentorship and sponsorship is one of a patronage model that speaks to the paternalistic nature characteristic within these kinds of relationships.

The mentor/mentee relationship discussed in women’s leadership development is not at face-value necessarily a problem—there can be benefits to these kinds of relationships. The
issue arises when we compare the discussions of mentorship to unisex literature where the focus shifts from *finding a mentor* to making sure that you can perform *as a mentor*. Within the SLC, two of their Five Exemplary Practices, Model the Way and Enable Others to Act, center around some form of mentorship or leading by example. Within Enable Others to Act, lies Commitment #8: Strengthening Others, where Kouzes and Posner describe the importance of student leaders to mentor and coach those around them. They state: “You need to mentor people because no one ever got to be the best at anything without the benefit of constructive feedback, probing questions, and thoughtful coaching . . . Mentoring and coaching is an essential part of exemplary leadership” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 205, 207). Hence, for Kouzes and Posner (2014), their audience is leaders who already have followers or those which they could mentor. Only towards the end of the section do they acknowledge the importance of aspiring leaders to seek out their own mentors. Kouzes and Posner (2014) almost flippantly suggest, “And while you’re at it, think about getting someone to mentor or coach you” (p. 207). That ends the discussion on finding a mentor in the SLC.

Women’s leadership texts argue that mentorship is key for women moving up the ranks in leadership positions. In this way, women are framed as deficient in some way or not fully formed (hence the need for mentorship), while at the same time responsibilized for finding the mentorship themselves. On the other hand, the unisex audience is assumed to be already equipped with the skills necessary to be a mentor, despite the fact that students—perhaps without a lot of formal experience—are still the primary audience. The gendered message then becomes clear: women, get a mentor, unisex leaders (or men), be a mentor. As will be further illustrated in the next section, such a proposal is indicative of other assumed skills or qualities that women leaders lack.

A final difference concerns the broader discussion of leader preparedness—the skills leaders need in order to be recognized by others as such. Women’s overall presentation or communication style is a very popular topic within women’s leadership development, emblematic of a makeover culture where reinvention often comes to mean changes in appearance. During the very same presentation, the NEW Leadership workshop presenter provided several “practical” self-presentation tips she insisted women should abide by if they want to be taken seriously. These included: dressing appropriately, which she clarified as, “don’t have your boobs out” because “let’s be honest women, men look at that stuff;” to always sit to the right of the leader at the meeting; to try and avoid ending your sentences with a high pitched voice; and to take deep breaths from your belly because this is where women’s power lie, “this is our strength and men don’t have this.”

Perhaps not surprising, dress, tone of voice, or other self-presentation skills were once again almost completely absent from the SLC (as well as unisex texts in general). The closest the SLC came to commenting on an individual’s appearance was in the chapter “Encourage the Heart,” where Kouzes and Posner (2014) suggest:

if you want people to be winners, you have to behave in ways that communicate to them that they are winners. And it’s not just about your words. It’s also about tone of voice, posture, gestures, and facial expressions. No yelling, frowning, making fun of people, or putting them down in front of others. Instead, it’s about being friendly, positive, supportive, and encouraging. (p. 218)

In this passage, the self-corrections are more about inspiring others than one’s self being the issue in need of adjustment. Whereas in women’s leadership literature, one’s woman-ness normally precedes the issue, such as in Lois P. Frankel’s (2004) Nice Girls Don’t Get the Corner
Office in a chapter called “Smiling Appropriately” (p. 186). Frankel acknowledges that girls “are socialized to smile more than boys” but that this can make men not take women seriously. To which she advises, “Pay more attention to when you’re smiling. I constantly coach women to ‘watch the smile’ . . . [but] Don’t quit smiling entirely—it contributes to your likability quotient, and likeability is a critical factor in achieving success” (Frankel, 2004, p. 187).

Beyond the former mention in the SLC, there were no instructions on how to adjust one’s tone of voice, the clothes you wear, or where to sit at a meeting. Instead, in the SLC it was assumed that the individual already possessed all these qualities—they were a natural part of anyone reading the book because they were already assumed to be a leader (connect this to the mentor argument above). In other words, the focus of the text was not about fixing certain qualities of one’s self in order to become a leader, but rather how to utilize skills already within you to fine tune one’s given leadership abilities.

For instance, rather than fixing your voice or communication style, as is often discussed in women’s leadership, the SLC talks about how to use your voice in a way that helps you communicate your vision. They do not critique the voice you have and tell you to change it, but rather advocate for you to discover it and then stay true what you say. In the SLC, Kouzes and Posner (2014) state:

To be most effective, leaders must learn to find the voice that represents who they are . . . leadership is a means of personal expression . . . Instead, you are free to choose what you want to express and the way you want to express it. (p. 27, 28, 30)

They continue that finding and using one’s voice is also important in terms of influencing one’s followers. “When you understand who you are and what your values are, then you can give voice to those values. Finding your voice encourages others to do the same, paving the way for understanding.” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 10). Contrast this with the line from Breaking into
the Boys Club stated in the opening of this chapter and the gendered difference is brought into sharp relief. Moreover, unlike women’s leadership which often advises against women taking too strong of a voice, the SLC advises leaders to “speak with authority” as it helps “others to experience your conviction for what you envision” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 109).

The advice on using your voice in LIG was much less explicitly gendered than in other women’s texts, though nevertheless present. LIG advises women to use their voice, but always in a self-policing manner. Sandberg (2014) offers an initial thesis:

Communication works best when we combine appropriateness with authenticity, finding that sweet spot where opinions are not brutally honest but delicately honest. Speaking truthfully without hurting feelings comes naturally to some and is an acquired skill for others. I definitely needed help in this area. Fortunately, I found it. (p. 78)

To make her point, Sandberg provides mainly personal accounts of when she experienced instances of miscommunication. She recounts a time when during her first week at a new job she called a high-ranking official’s office to ask for a favor rather than calling to offer her assistance or see if there was anything she could do to help the official. The official did not respond kindly to Sandberg’s approach and returned her call by yelling and swearing at her over the phone. Apparently, having a man yell at her over a simple error in judgement did her a “huge favor” (Sandberg, 2014, p. 107). Sandberg described the incident as him providing her with feedback that was “extremely helpful” (Sandberg, 2014, p. 107). Rather than advise women to do the same (yell back!)—or that it might be important that said man also reflects on his masculinist rage—Sandberg continues by discussing the benefits of clearly communicating in the workplace.

This difference between women’s and unisex leadership development is an important one. It is the difference between knowing oneself to become an expert leader versus knowing oneself so that you can make strategic decisions about how to present multiple facets of oneself (gendered and personal) to hopefully be recognized as a leader by others. Women’s leadership
assumes subjects in need of preparation, unisex assumes its subjects are already prepared and merely in need of further advisement. Accordingly, readers of women’s leadership (i.e. women), versus those who read unisex literature, are always already presumed to be not-leaders. As a result, women are conditioned to feel un-leaderly or perpetually in need of reshaping to compensate for merely being a woman.

* * *

The differences between women’s leadership development and unisex leadership development is telling. Although all leadership development materials impose on the individual in some way (as seen in Chapter 5), in comparison with the unisex literature, women’s leadership offers a specific and pointed gendered discourse that takes ‘women’ as its object for adjustment. While both men and women can read unisex literature, the underlying masculinist logics of mainstream development materials require that women read with a ‘split consciousness’ or adopt masculinist modes of being and leading, as explained earlier. If women choose to read unisex leadership development literature, then, they are ‘fixed’ through adjusting to masculine standards of leading. If women read women’s leadership development literature, while they may not have to adopt a masculinist consciousness, they are nevertheless made acutely aware that they are, in fact, women, and that this in itself needs adjusting—adjusting to ways that successfully navigate (but also occasionally challenge) masculine ways of leading.

On the other hand, with no development discourses that identifies as ‘men’s leadership,’ male readers and leaders are never positioned as in need of improvement because they are men—or exhibit masculinity, or have a penis. Because men mainly engage with ‘unisex’ leadership development, framed as gender-neutral, men experience far less critique or policing on behalf of their gender. Dominant groups are instead able to engage with unisex leadership
development in ways that allow them to develop themselves as leaders without having to consider the experiences of others or those left out of the discourse. For instance, men can become leaders without necessarily having to contemplate the work/life balance decisions that constitute large chunks of the women’s literature. Men develop themselves as leaders without having to consider the emotional labor that comes with constantly policing your body, clothes, and tone of voice—those kinds of adjustments are left for the ‘diverse’ leaders to read or learn about. White people get to read about how to enhance their professionalism without ever having to consider the ways in which such ‘professional’ mannerisms and expectations come from a history of white middle class respectability politics and nicety (Nkomo & Ariss, 2013). Instead, men and/or white individuals put their efforts towards developing their visions for the future, to learning how to develop trust amongst their followers, or to make sure they ‘model the way’ appropriately for those they choose to mentor.

When concerns are raised that women’s leadership development only address women and do not consider the changes that need to come from the male-dominated spaces and places in the workplace or culture (Sugiyama et al., 2016), they are usually not met with responses that look to alter unisex leadership development efforts. More often, the solution is to create more women’s conferences, more women’s leadership institutes, or more women’s leadership development trainings. Even the strategies provided by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to close the leadership gender gap places the spotlight onto individual women, as the report states: “we recommend that women immerse themselves in the leadership literature most relevant to their own career paths” (2016, p. 35). Instructing women to alter or reconcile their feminine wiles, women’s leadership development makes very clear that it is up to the individual woman to ensure she makes the necessary changes to succeed, and that this starts with fixing
themselves. Not only that, but at the very moment that women are told they are the problem to be fixed, they are also hailed as the solution to all the problems of our turbulent times.

Discussion

As mentioned earlier, calls for more women leaders often comes from the idea that women are more moral, transformative, or socially just in their leadership practices and can save us from the prevailing crises we face. The rhetoric of women as the harbinger of social or progressive change is important to consider in combination with the previous section on woman-ness as the problem to be fixed in leadership development discourse. As discussed in Chapter 4, the neoliberal multicultural rationale suggests that equality has already been achieved for historically marginalized groups and it is now individual willpower and choice which determines social and economic success. For women who now have the right to both professional and personal fulfillment, the market is merely a benevolent and neutral platform at the disposal of responsible, prudent consumers who choose to invest her own destiny. This is the first responsibilization process for women. This individualistic ideology works to create a woman subject that is not only self-reliant and self-governing, but fully responsible for her own successes and failures (Besley & Peters, 2007). Women now ostensibly have every opportunity to become leaders and therefore succeed, it is merely on them to decide to lean in.

The second responsibilization process comes with the framing of women as more apt for leadership in turbulent times. That women should be naturally more transformative or socially just leaders is not new to feminist scholars who have long critiqued the emotional, nurturing, or empathetic expectations culturally assigned to women (Ahmed, 2010; Satz, 2017; Tong, & Williams, 2016). Often these more morally-oriented leadership styles found in women leaders are either attributed to women’s innate abilities or the gendered socialization of women to be
more caring and nurturing than men. Prior to Second Wave considerations of gender essentialism in the US, several feminist scholars debated whether women were more morally pious than men (Tong, & Williams, 2016). For instance, in the late 18th century Mary Wollstonecraft argued that if given the chance and the same education women would be just as moral as men (Tong, & Williams, 2016). Debates surrounding women’s morality were also used as a way to argue for or against women’s right to work or fair pay. As morally superior, women should stay out of the public sphere and use their natural gifts to raise morally sound children. In the mid 19th century, social feminists, in contrast, advocated for (white) women’s participation in the workforce as a means to balance the morality of men who were framed as corrupt and riddled with immoral vices (Tong, & Williams, 2016). Regardless of how women’s morality has been deployed, the majority of arguments are nevertheless essentialists—believing that women were innately nurturing, caring, and moral than men.

Impregnating women with the responsibility of being more morally righteous or socially just in their leadership practices not only reifies these notions of traditional femininity and essentialist stereotypes, but also responsibilizes women to lead in more socially progressive ways that makes them once again the primary caretaker of everyone else. While this framing operates under the guise of a compliment, it nevertheless now responsibilizes women to not only be leaders, but to be moral leaders who play nice and include everyone. It mandates that women continue to be the nurturers/peacemakers once again—or at the very least ignores the gender socialization that may have encouraged women to be more democratic or inclusive in the first place. In other words, advocating for women as more just or democratic in combination with self-making practices situates women as not only responsibilized for themselves, but responsibilized for the wellbeing and comfort of everyone else as well.
Certainly, this dual responsibilization is a labor issue. The impetus of women’s leadership to focus on adjusting internal barriers illuminates the rearticulations of labor under neoliberalism where the self becomes a site of unpaid work (as explored in Chapter 4). But more than that, suited so perfectly to the model of neoliberalism, women’s leadership reinstitutes both internal and external forms of labor for women, under the guise of empowerment. The idea of women as more collaborative or nurturing leads to women being expected to perform much more emotional labor than men—both in their organizations broadly, or in their intimate interpersonal relationships. If a woman leader chooses not to perform in these ways, she is often scrutinized as not a team player, shrewd, or even unwomanly (Heilman, 2012). This places women in a precarious position where their superior kindness is leveraged in calls which responsibilize women to play nice and nurture others no matter the cost. Women can find themselves in the position of performing emotional labor even in deeply toxic cultures, as well as potentially hostile environments, all of which will never be appreciated or considered as labor above and beyond the expectations of others (Gill, 2009). In the simplest terms: Women’s leadership constitutes a subject that is not only responsibilized to overcome their internal barriers and develop their leadership skills, but to also be sure that they access their unique womanly gifts to make sure everyone else if okay as well. At the same time, the casting of women as morally progressive or inclusive in their practices diverts attention away from men’s responsibility (as communicated through unisex leadership) to do the same. As a consequence, the dominant group is exonerated from similar forms of labor or responsibility.

What all of these discussions surrounding women’s leadership illustrate is how neoliberalism does not necessarily work against identity, culture, or multiculturalism, but rather through it (Duggan, 2003). Many critical scholars have noted the ways in which the US
approaches inclusion via assimilation, multiculturalism via representation, and social justice via legal equality in order to profess notions of tolerance rather than equity or any recognizable redistribution of power (see Duggan, 2003; Ferguson, 2012; Spade, 2011). For instance, during the 1980s, the widespread encouragement of multiculturalism had the unfortunate effect of “replacing the emphasis on race and racism with an emphasis on cultural diversity” (Ferguson, 2012, p. 191). Since then, neoliberal modes of multiculturalism and inclusion have served as a “means of using difference to foster capitalist distribution while curtailing social redistribution for underrepresented folks” (Ferguson, 2012, p. 192). Within the neoliberal university, the co-option of diversity has appeared in initiatives that promote equality and inclusion for the purposes of profit and competition. For example, the practice of featuring a high number of students of color on promotional materials is a typical marketing strategy for predominantly white universities across the United States. In 2000, the University of Wisconsin—Madison was even caught photo-shopping the face of a black student onto the cover of their university application booklet to make the image of students attending a football game appear more racially diverse (Prichep, 2013).

The current argument to include women because they are more moral, transformational, or socially progressive than men, is emblematic of neoliberalism’s instrumental approach to diversity—justifying women in leadership roles (or diverse bodies in any other realm) insofar as they contribute something to the bottom line (Carroll, 2015). The lower wages we usually pay ‘diverse’ bodies are also not incidental to the bottom line. Under neoliberalism, increasing the number of women and/or people of color within the ranks becomes a corporate strategy—another item to be managed. For example, in the circulating leadership materials today, like a
report from Belsin by Delliot called “Building an Inclusive Culture” (2017), they describe the
importance of increasing corporate diversity by stating:

Why do inclusive cultures matter? Our research found that organizations with inclusive
cultures, when compared with organizations that lack inclusive cultures, tend to be:

- Six times more likely to be innovative
- Six times more likely to anticipate change and respond effectively
- Twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets. (p. 1)

While incorporating different viewpoints is an important aspect of inclusion, justifying said inclusion through the lens of organizational gain dismisses the value of diversity in its own right or as a baseline ethical value. As such, the aims of “improving working conditions or extending the scope for collective self-development and self-determination are not, therefore, justifiable as ends in themselves, but only if and insofar as they help improve business performance or bestow legitimacy upon oppressive practices” (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007, p. 10). Thus, studies and reports which focus on the success of women’s leadership, even when couched in positive ideals like social justice, inevitably align with Derrik Bell’s (1980) theory of ‘interest convergence,’ which suggests that those in power will only support the rights of minoritized humans should it serve them in some respect.

The resulting climate of neoliberal multiculturalism today is one where, race or gender are commodified for capital gain or corporate interest, while at the same time considered merely the individual markers of identity, trivial and private. The very suggestion that women fix themselves internally or personally as a means of collective empowerment illustrates neoliberal ethos of individualism and rearticulation of social justice: That social change happens via individual self-work rather than through collective, democratic action. Not surprisingly, early narratives of personal responsibility, empowerment, and self-esteem under neoliberalism have existed in tandem with widespread welfare elimination, the high incarceration of people of color,
and anti-immigration policy (e.g., California Proposition 187) (Ferguson, 2012; McGee, 2005). Indeed, within the US, the encouragement of self-work for minoritized communities has often come at the cost of obscuring systemic analyses that might benefit them most. As the historically marginalized individuals’ will is made the arbiter of success, systemic critique is rendered not only unnecessary but also invalid. As Angela McRobbie (2009) writes “Capitalism has produced the need for, and the possibility of, women’s liberation” (p. 45). No longer held back by the gender roles of the past, the new post-feminist landscape granted (predominantly white) women the opportunities for success as it re-centered the discourse of individualism. In this way, “Patriarchal authority was subsumed within a regime of self-policing” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 63). Again, neoliberalism resignified feminist politics in a way that redirected the feminist platform for equality within the workforce as a “liberal-individualist scenario,” where women were encouraged to be financially independent, to work, and to take full advantage of their newfound freedom through careful monitoring of themselves and their life path (Fraser, 2013, para. 5). As a consequence, “The landscape of self-improvement substitutes for the feminist values of solidarity and support and instead embraces and promotes female individualisation and condemnation of those who remain unable or unwilling to help themselves” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 73). Under the narratives of freedom, choice, and personal responsibility the decision to work on oneself was now a moral expectation.

Women’s leadership in the university then, although holding the potential to recoup power for marginalized groups, has instead become part of the complex web of neoliberal, neocolonialist institutions of “identification, incorporation, and regulation” (Ferguson, 2012, p. 190). Rather, the neoliberal university has come to serve as what Roderick Ferguson (2012) calls “a prominent site of minority reconciliation” (p. 189). As described in Chapter 4, both in
and outside of academia there has been a concerted effort to impose managerial mentalities and capitalist values onto all, but especially those who have been historically excluded from positions of authority and wealth. As a place “that might educate minoritized subjects into the political identities and protocols of the nation,” the university served as a site where leadership can inculcate more bodies into self-monitoring, managerialism (Ferguson, 2012, p. 189). As corporate discourse spread through the university under the rhetoric of leadership training, elite minorities could now serve as the new proponents of managerial discourse, a shining example of the American Dream and what’s possible if one tries hard enough. As Kathi Weeks (2011) argues “all these demands for inclusion serve at the same time to expand the scope of the work ethic to new groups and new forms of labor, and to reaffirms its power” (p. 68).

As the neoliberal landscape incorporates historically marginalized identities into the discourses of self-work—reinvigorating a ‘bootstraps’ mentality—possibilities of redistributing power and privilege becomes occluded by the notion of personal willpower and hard work. In fact, such a formation bolsters the model minority paradigm. Images of the model minority have been used by white culture to position certain races in competition with one another. For instance, the model minority stereotype of the smart, hard working, obedient Asian, has been used to position African American and black people as less cooperative, unintelligent, and inadequately accustomed to (white) culture (Lee, 2003). The model minority discourse has functioned to police other races as it simultaneously enforces both aspirational work and conspicuous consumption as visible markers of successful assimilation and thus belonging. “While never achieving dominance, and while many people from socially and economically disenfranchised communities would experience deeper levels of impoverishment, many women
and people of color would become politicians, business executives, students, and professors in predominantly white institutions” (Ferguson, 2012, p. 191).

By no means is this analysis meant to dismiss the important and transformational work which has been advanced by those committed to challenging the injustices over the past several decades. Rather, it is to highlight the ways in which the politics surrounding identity which have been used for progress, have at the same time been central to the success of upward distribution and the safeguarding of power for the elite (Duggan, 2003; Ferguson, 2012). The result is a market which has co-opted multiculturalism and ‘identity politics’ in ways that feed the very systems such movements intended to resist. Women as the self-made moral center of leadership integrity, is not only an essentialist notion, but also one suited to the diversity initiatives of neoliberalism—as docile bodies which serve a function for capitalist expansion.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to not only show leadership’s focus on the self/individual even when speaking collectively about a particular group (i.e., women), but also the pitfalls that come with utilizing the category of ‘woman’ as a way to foster equality. Research demonstrates that when women perform as expected—including others or creating democratic organizations—because of the gendered institutions within which they operate, they are often seen as too soft (Kimmel, 2011). Yet, when they adopt a more masculine approach to leadership, they are seen as too aggressive, or even worse, a disappointment, because they are not the beacon of hope and change we expect them naturally to be. It is lose/lose for women in leadership. As it stands now, mainstream leadership discourse limits the accessibility of the leader position for anyone who does not conform to typical white or masculinist structures, or gender and sexual normativity. This is especially important to critique given the contemporary context where not
only is the trend in leadership to declare that with training everyone can be a leader, but also because many current development efforts specifically target and market to previously minoritized individuals in leadership, like those who are queer-identified, women, and/or people of color.

Although it seems a compliment to assume women are more innately transformative or inclusive, this puts women in an impossible position. While Sandberg’s no nonsense, take action, and lean in approach is the dominant discourse that tells women they should be leaders and efficient, productive, neoliberal subjects, women are simultaneously hailed to impart their good nature to save us in times of crisis. As such, women leaders will nevertheless disappoint us because they are conditioned to act in neoliberal ways that require they ignore the very collaborative politics or transformational leading we come to rely on them for. No longer caught between the doormat and the bitch, women in leadership now find themselves caught between change agent and the neoliberal prize horse. Hence, the notion that women are responsible for fixing themselves in tandem with the expectation of women as morally and socially just leaders adds another layer to the double bind women already experience.

Creating more women’s leadership development will not solve the problems with the prevailing concepts of good leadership and effective leaders. Over the last several decades, women’s leadership institutes or materials have increased significantly, with numerous texts available and nearly every national leadership organization offering a women’s leadership conference or program. In the 21st century, we find now that “the literature offers something for everyone” (McGee, 2005, p. 47). Yet, the increasing number of resources or opportunities for women’s leadership development, has not necessarily meant that the whiteness or patriarchal nature of leadership has been similarly refashioned. When such a niche is created (although
perhaps with the best and most inclusive of intentions), the unisex literature is permitted to continue unquestioned for its male-centered or whitewashed approaches to leadership. You can see this same thing happen, for instance, on university campuses when the creation of diversity centers, are leveraged as a way to ignore the whiteness or male-dominance in most other spaces. Moreover, while liberal equality movements, which seek to have women reach parity with men is important, they do not necessarily destabilize the underlying sexist logics of leadership, nor do they reshape the gendered, masculinist institutions where leaders are both developed and active.

In part, this is because the fact that men have a gender, too, is often left out of the discussion. As mentioned earlier, since masculinity and men are the norm, their practices are read as neutral or natural. If men were more a part of the conversation then we might be asking different kinds of questions. Instead of insisting that we need more women leaders because they are more morally sound or transformational leaders, we might ask why men are so poor at leading from a moral place or leading transformationally. Instead of asking why women are underrepresented in leadership roles, we might be better served asking why men are overrepresented. Unfortunately, these are not the questions usually asked, and analyses of women’s leadership only brings forward other pressing questions. What does it mean when women and leadership texts want women in top positions and unisex literature says leadership is non-positional? Why have ‘women’ become the central target of leadership development more so than other marginalized identities? When does the intersectionality of identity and oppression become a focus of leadership? Were Butler and other critical feminists right: Can true emancipation ever be reached under the ‘woman’ identifier? How do we expand leadership or the leader subject position to be more open and accessible to those who perform leadership differently? Perhaps the larger question to address is one put forth by Nancy Harding (2014) who
asked “how do we change the norms within and through which leaders’ identities are constituted and leadership self-making occurs?” (p. 408)

Ostensibly, movements to develop more women as leaders are valuable and necessary, especially given that women (but also queer-identified people and people of color) have for so long been excluded from leadership roles and positions across various organizations. However, under neoliberalism we often find the co-option and cannibalization of social justice endeavors rearticulated to serve the market and inevitably maintain the status quo (Melamed, 2011). Leadership discourse and its popular leadership texts, such as the ones analyzed in this project, are a part of that process. So while the prevailing discourse suggests that regardless of identity, everyone and anyone can be a leader, critical scholars need to be cognizant of the ways in which—counter to the uplifting message—not all people or styles of leadership may, in actuality, be accepted or taught as ‘good’ leadership.16
CHAPTER SEVEN: A LIFE OF LEADERSHIP

Me: Can I come to your monthly leadership meeting?

Danielle: Why do you want to come to my leadership meeting? That’s like you wanting to come into the bathroom to watch me poop.

Over the course of writing this dissertation, leadership has entered my life in the strangest of ways. As I have said many times, my interest in leadership began when I started working as the Leadership Coordinator in a Student Affairs office at Freedom University. It was in this role that I started to recognize the absurdity of the neoliberal university and the problematic ways it regards leadership and its development within students. I left my job in Student Affairs three years later, but my connection to the office and to the leadership industry remained. The new Leadership Coordinator hired after me, Danielle, became my roommate. Every day she would come home from work and talk to me about leadership programming, ideas for development workshops, and we bickered constantly about the purposes and point of leadership in the university. I would rant about how leadership development was a neoliberal tool to discipline student bodies and acculturate them to the discourses of professionalism and obedience. Danielle, in contrast, maintained a hopeful and optimistic stance that students could become leaders and make a positive impact on the world; that student leaders would change the world. It was like I never left the office. As if that was not enough leadership in my life, when I moved out and left my Leadership Coordinator roommate behind, I moved in with a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach: my current partner. As you read in Chapter 5, my opinion of the Strengths model is less than forgiving. It is a weird state of existence when your scholarly orientations conflict with your libidinal and intimate longings: loving a person who is certified in total bullshit. Although I have studied leadership for the last seven years, attended dozens of
leadership workshops and institutes, and held several positions of leadership in my career, I never thought that leadership would be my intellectual fetish. In fact, I have never considered myself as a leader and I have never strived to be a leader. But despite what I think or what I want, I cannot ignore that for several years professionally, and several recent years personally, leadership has been my life.

While in previous chapters I took aim at some prevailing leadership theories or development practices, in this chapter I take aim at myself (and the self, writ large). In this short piece, I center my experience and my thoughts on leadership to close a rather critical project on a personal note and re-remind the reader “there is a person here” (Butler, 1990, p. xvii). I also want to end this project with some anecdotes and musings regarding leadership that did not seem to fit within the chapters, but that I think deserve to be explored nonetheless, perhaps in future research on the subject. If is it not clear by now, this is not your traditional discussion chapter, where I propose to solve leadership and lay out clear solutions as to how to address the problems analyzed within the project. As Ahmed (2012) suggests, “Solutions to problems can create new problems” (p. 46). It is also not my intention to share personal experiences in the anticipation that you might come to know me better. To me, that sounds like yet another leadership activity. Instead, this final chapter looks to elaborate on ways we might think about leadership given the current state of US politics, and to generate a few alternative lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) or creative mutations that seek not to fix leadership, but to further rattle its foundational assumptions.

**Reclaiming Leadership?: You Can Still Be an Authentic Asshole**

Although I do not desire to prescribe specific ways to solve the problems of leadership discourse addressed in this dissertation, there have been many others who have attempted to do
At the National Women’s Studies Association annual conference in 2014, I attended a session that proposed we create a feminist leadership studies. The panelists argued that leadership could be reclaimed from the heroic, male-centered models; that a feminist leadership was possible. Because of my research and opinion on leadership, I was struck by the idea. Is feminist leadership an oxymoron, I wondered. What exactly would a feminist leadership look like? The panelists explained that a feminist leadership would recognize and promote women’s experiences, that it would take a global perspective, and that it would advocate for more diverse leaders.

Like the panelists at the conference, there have been many who have tried to make leadership a collaborative practice (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2013; Rubin, 2009) or give it a social justice framing (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). Social justice leadership in education is even its own popular line of inquiry within Education and Leadership Studies (e.g., Gerstl-Pepin & Aiken, 2012). But like feminist leadership, I am curious if social justice leadership is possible. Can leadership—inhernently (linguistically) hierarchical and tethered to masculinist, colonialist, white discourses—ever become something which aligns with social justice praxis? Or, is ‘social justice leadership’ something similar to ‘sustainable capitalism,’ where lip service to sustainability and environmental justice hides the fact that corporations rely on slave labor and drain the wells from local communities to make their product? What, then, might a social justice leadership hide? And in the present post-truth moment where everyone’s opinions and their right to express them are understood as equally valid and welcomed, I am also pained to ask: If we do create a social justice leadership, whose form or definition of social justice are we using?17
It is worth taking a slight detour for a moment to explore this question further and to consider about how the everyone-can-be-a-leader rhetoric explored in this project (and arguably one that is thought of as socially just for its inclusive approach) can become a dangerous theory in a post-truth culture. A culture where, for instance, the number of people in attendance at an inauguration can be blatantly misrepresented, despite pictures (Hunt, 2017), and one can deny without hesitation having said something discriminatory, despite having been recorded saying it (Kenny, 2018). Unsurprisingly, this post-truth movement extends to issues of racism and sexism, for instance, where the facts of such matters become replaced by individual opinion or feeling. For example, in 2017 Heineken released a new television ad entitled Open Your World, that featured people who have, what Heineken represents as, ‘different opinions’ on ‘controversial subjects’ coming together to discuss their issues and finding common ground while sipping on a Heineken. A climate change denier sits down with man who understands climate change (only in a post-truth world could these be seen as equally informed parties), a man who hates feminism sits down with a woman who identifies as such, and a transphobic man sits down with a transgender woman. What this Heineken ad misconstrues is that these ‘differences’ are not opinion-based debates like who wore it best or whether Speed 2 was really necessary. Rather, climate change is real, sexism is real, and being transgender is not an opinion. To dispute sexism or say you do not believe someone is transgender is not a simple statement of opinion but rather a violent denial of another person’s reality. It is a false equivalency to insist that these are issues, like any other, where everyone’s opinion is equally valid.

While it may seem as though tangential to a study on leadership, I think the post-truth culture that recasts morality and co-opts social justice movements poses some interesting challenges to creating social justice leadership. Leaders are idealized to be the moral center of
the group or organization. Authentic Leadership, which I examined in Chapter 5, even requires it: insisting that authentic leaders reflect on themselves to the point where they discover their ‘core values’ or ‘morals’ and the act in accordance with them at all times (see Avolio & Gardner, 2005). However, if truth becomes muddied with unfounded opinions in the post-truth moment, then does not morality also become an open plane for multiple rights and wrongs to transpire? What if one’s core value is that white people are superior to black people? Or that they morally disagree with people being gay and feel it is an illness in need of treatment? If one believes such things and then acts in accordance with them, can they be an authentic leader?

Unfortunately, the Trump presidency has answered this question for us. According to Chris Crandall, Trump is read by most as a very authentic leader (Vedantam, 2017). In fact, understandings of authenticity as being true to oneself coupled with Trump’s discriminatory, sexist, racist, ableist, and xenophobic comments, makes Trump appear as though he is the embodiment of authenticity par excellence, willing to say things even if uncouth, inappropriate, or politically incorrect because it is who he truly and authentically is at his core. In an interview on NPR’s Hidden Brain, Crandall explains this idea further:

People said that Donald Trump was very authentic, and we wondered – there’s really two ways that that could go. . . . With the case of prejudice, we wondered if maybe people thought he was authentic because he was saying these horrible things that they thought were horrible. But holy cow, at least he says it. . . . That’s one possibility. The other possibility is exactly the opposite. And that is, authenticity is really just code words for saying, you are saying the prejudice that I have. An authentic person is somebody who says what I feel when I can’t say it myself. (Vedantam, 2017)

So what does this mean then for authenticity? For leadership? And in the current context where it is open season on morality and everyone’s opinion gets a seat at the table, what will a social justice leadership look like? Trump’s ‘authentic leadership’ brings to light a glaring omission in leadership discourse: While the mainstream leadership literature may instruct us to be moral and
authentic, it does not provide boundaries for what kind of morality and authenticity are acceptable. It seems people can always identify what leadership is not, without ever having to say what it is. In part, this is because mainstream leadership theory frames the concept as atheoretical and therefore ostensibly apolitical. Most leadership gurus generally overlook ‘bad’ leaders and do not see a need to impart any definitions of morality because of the valorization and romanticization of the concept within Leadership Studies (see Chapter 5) (Lakomski, 1999). As a result, it seems we are left with the Wild Wild West of morality where Donald Trump, the Alt-Right, or others who attack the most vulnerable in society are able to maintain positions as leaders and praised for sticking to their guns. But more than that, what the example of Trump highlights is what happens when leadership development is so focused on inclusion that it forgets to stand for something. To draw a line in the proverbial sand. Perhaps Trump is exactly what we deserve because our previous definitions of leadership have become open. Everyone can be a leader, remember.

All of this taken together is why I question whether we can—or even should—reclaim leadership. My answer right now is an emphatic NO. I do not think we can fix leadership. Can you even fix something that was never broken? Leadership was not necessarily intended to be an inclusive practice, a position of social justice. But do not panic. Letting go of ‘leadership’ does not mean that the alternative is social chaos—organizations overrun, employees drifting aimlessly without their fearless leader to guide them. To reject the everyone-can-be-a-leader model is not a fall into a dogmatic no-one-can-be-a-leader discourse either. Rather it is important to remain cautious of the overwhelming adoption of such an all-inclusive leadership discourse given an ‘anything goes’ political climate. As Ahmed (2012) writes, “the very promise of inclusion can be the concealment and thus extension of exclusion” (p. 183).
What I do propose in place of reclaiming leadership is (no surprise to my committee) more critique. Although mainstream leadership texts often present ‘objective,’ ‘scientific’ studies and big data to support their development advice, critical leadership researchers must continue to challenge such assertions and illuminate the biases and exclusionary rhetoric such texts reflect and reproduce—despite the scientific methods they may employ. This involves the continuous act of questioning and challenging the taken for granted assumptions in leadership in order to disentangle their potentially limiting and discriminatory actions. If the imperative is to make leadership an ‘inclusive’ space, then interrogating the particular logics that undergird and inform leadership becomes an important project in deconstructing the power and discourses that work to constitute the subject position of ‘a leader.’ Moreover, critically examining leadership does not just offer the conceptual tools to understand why or how we come to ‘know’ or interpret leadership, but also fosters the possibility of theoretical rearticulations of ‘leadership’ which, at a foundational level, can reimagine it as a space where transformative or alternative affective, social, or political relationships are possible—ways that leadership has the potential to transgress, reimagine, and inspire alternative material realities. Rather than provide simple solutions, the aim of this project has been to destabilize the discourses that have been accepted as natural or common sense. Like queer theory, which aims to “make the familiar strange” (O’Rourke, 2015b), I have tried in this project to deconstruct the power relations and injustices hidden in our quotidian leadership practices and to rupture the foundation upon which we build our development programs in higher education.¹⁸

**Is There a Leader in Me?**

Perhaps another way to challenge post-truth modes of authenticity that insist ‘to thine own self be true’ is to confront the *self* in leadership. Any effort to reclaim leadership might as
well be abandoned if the contemporary considerations of self and self-making are not also re-conceptualized at the same time. As discussed throughout the project, the focus on the self in leadership not only engages students in a never-ending process of labor, but it is also obscures that they are part of a collective body. Indeed, current leadership practices in the university have the consequence of individualizing problems that are actually systemic. We tell students to become leaders in order to make themselves marketable and appealing to future employers, rather than educating them on the economic instability, contingent labor, and unfair wages that neoliberalism engenders (and thrives on). But as McGee (2005) reminds us, “The demand for individual self-development and realization without the possibility of economic security can never be more than an ideological carrot or a bludgeon” (p. 183). Thus, there is a need to shift the discussion from thinking about leadership in terms of making one’s self over for job recognition to that of a constituent element of politics for radical social change.

The focus on the self in leadership also overstates the importance of self-determination. We continue to idealize leaders as these individual, self-actualized, self-motivated, and courageous persons who succeeded in becoming leaders all by their own devices. Like the self-made man discussed in Chapter 6, such images conceal the fact that any successful individual or leader is dependent upon others, often masking the exploitation and unpaid labor of women and people of color who do the emotional care work behind the scenes. What’s more, thinking of leadership and success in this way overlooks issues of privilege and power that give some social, economic, and political advantages over others—that some must insist on things merely given to others (Ahmed, 2012). If leadership discourse continues to center a mode of self-development that is stripped of any systemic or social considerations, then the vision of a socially just or radically different form of leadership can never be realized. We need models of leadership
which challenge popular notions of the self and self-making so that we might imagine “ways of making over culture rather than remaining subject to makeover culture” (McGee, 2005, p. 187).

But in advocating that we lose our selves in leadership, I have to consider if I have let go of my leadership self? Did I even have one to begin with? I often feel more like Kelly’s (2013) interpretation of leadership: an absent present (discussed in Chapter 2). I am always in some leadership situation, but never seen as a leader. In his book The Reorder of Things, Roderick Ferguson (2012) asks: Can you be in the university but not of the university? His question made me think: Can I be in leadership without being of leadership? My experiences have taught me, yes, most certainly this is a possibility. It feels like leadership is the easiest fraternity I never joined and yet I’m constantly being hazed. There are many instances where I have been told to mingle more at leadership trainings, to share personal details in icebreakers, to have a better attitude, and to embrace my leadership self.

At one leadership retreat, I remember vividly the feeling of simultaneous shame and pride that I experienced during a debrief activity when my lack of leader-ness was pointed out. Several other students and I had just finished participating in an activity where participants took turns being blindfolded while the others in the group had to guide them safely from one tree log to another. The point of the activity, we were told, was to build communication skills, though to me it seemed like merely an exercise in balance. In moments like these I tend to operate from the notion that there can be too many cooks in the kitchen, so to speak, so rather than making sure everyone hears my thoughts on how best to approach guiding blindfolded members across logs, I opt to stay quiet and let others who seek to be in control and have their opinions heard the opportunity. After the activity was finished, the facilitator asked that we all circle-up and talk through our recent experience. However, rather than just talk about what we saw, we had to use
a ball of yarn to reflect on the activity. Participants were instructed to compliment another
person in the group on the leadership they saw them exhibit during the activity—how they
helped them, how their guidance was useful, how their communication was clear—and while
holding on to one piece of the yarn, they were to toss the ball to their complementee, who would
then do the same. Eventually, with each person holding on to a piece of the yarn, a web would
be created. The facilitator called it a ‘web of appreciation.’ One by one the group members
passed the string around. Surprise, surprise, I got the string last. Not only did the string-passer
not know my name, she missed my presence entirely, forgetting that I was sitting in the circle
until the facilitator reminded her that “we have one more person left to thank.” By not speaking
up during the previous activity I had become an invisible, disengaged outsider—and definitely
not a leader. Not sure how much more of a leadership self I could lack in this case. As I reflect
on it now, I question what a more explicit anti-leader response might have been? To cut the
string?

I do not recount my leadership failures to inspire pity or to complain about how hard my
‘leadership journey’ has been. It has not been hard, and the experiences do not deserve pity.
Instead, I describe some of these instances to highlight the unstated rules of leadership and to
show that there are many ways of being which do not comport with the standards of leadership
despite prevailing mantra that everyone can be a leader. And after reflecting on the dissertation
research and my life in leadership I could not tell you if I have a leadership self—a carefully
crafted leader in me—but I think that is the point. I am comforted by the words of Foucault who
expresses a sentiment that feels similar to where I might be at as a self; as an ‘I’:

I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and
work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when
you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the
courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end. (Martin, 1988, p. 9)
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NOTES

1 This is the same Lawrence Summers who in a 2005 speech stated that one of the reasons we find very few women in top positions in science is due to “issues of intrinsic aptitude,” and also hinted that this was in part because “because many women with young children are unwilling or unable to put in the 80-hour work-weeks needed to succeed in those fields” (Hemel, 2005, para. 7). Interestingly, the original transcript of this 2005 speech is no longer available on Harvard’s website.

2 Related to Kellerman’s term is Pat Thompson, Helen Gunter, Jill Blackmore’s conceptualization of the leadership industry, or what they refer to as the Transnational Leadership Package (Gillies, 2013).

3 For an exception, see Kellerman, 2012.

4 Teresa de Lauretis is credited with coining the term queer theory. She first used the word in 1991 in a special issue of the journal differences that she edited, entitled "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities.”

5 Parts of this section have been previously published by the author in Ferry, N. C. (2017). It’s a family business!: Leadership texts as technologies of heteronormativity. Leadership. doi: 10.1177/1742715017699055

6 I did attempt to find an already established leadership archive, but one does not seem to exist. I would argue that because ‘leadership’ is such a nebulous and adaptable word, a traditional archive on leadership could arguably have everything (or nothing at all) within it. The closest things I found to ‘archives on leadership’ were locally based and narrowed by some other identifier, like The Women and Leadership Archives (WLA) at Loyola University in Chicago. This alone can tell us something about the ways in which leadership is seen interdisciplinary and thus considered part of archives, as I suspect many archives include leadership materials in their collections, rather than a whole archive in itself.

7 Drawing from the work of Micki McGee (2005), makeover culture, like self-help or self-improvement culture, refers to cultural imperative to re-make the self in particular and fashionable ways. Television shows, magazines, and books which ambush people with their deficiencies and then promise to make them over into a better person in some regard are popular and numerous. ‘Makeover culture’ signals a society that is full of these resources, but also one in which the making oneself over in some way is not only an option, but an expectation for participation in society. The imperative to improve oneself becomes an obligation.

8 A discussion on the development of positive psychology is beyond the scope of this paper, but it emerged in the late 1980s and 90s in response to the field of psychology’s overwhelming focus on mainly negative emotional states. One of the fist texts on the subject was Michael Argyle’s The Psychology of Happiness in 1987.

9 Widely used and immensely popular, both in and outside of academia, but without any scientific backing or support. See Winkie (2017).

10 By ‘positivity movement’ or ‘positivity culture’ I mean the insistence within US culture to always be happy, optimistic and positive, no matter how you might actually be feeling. It is implied that one should repress any negative emotions and/or keep negative thoughts or comments to themselves. For an expanded discussion on the positivity movement see Ahmed (2010) or Ehrenreich (2009)
This description was taken from the NEW Leadership Conference’s application on Freedom University’s website.

I am borrowing the use of this term from Micki McGee in her book *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* (2005) where she examines the ‘unisex’ literature of self-improvement in comparison to the literature of self-improvement that targets women specifically. I intentionally chose to use the word ‘unisex’ over gender-neutral or gender-blind because mainstream leadership discourse is decidedly very gendered. Moreover, mainstream leadership discourse almost never addresses gender outside of the gender binary. By definition, ‘unisex’ refers to both sexes (as if there are only 2). Gender-inclusive or all-gender, on the other hand, recognizes that there are more than two sexes. Since this acknowledgement is uncommon in mainstream leadership discourse, ‘unisex’ seemed a more accurate description of who their ostensibly gender-neutral materials seek to address.

Women in Leadership: Outsmart the Work-Life Balance is the title of a course offered by Cornell. More information on the program can be found at https://www.ecornell.com/certificates/leadership-and-strategic-management/women-in-leadership/

This quote was taken from the website for the program found here: https://www.hks.harvard.edu/educational-programs/executive-education/leadership-crises

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Post-truth has been defined as a state in which “objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016).

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