

**The Leader Label: Using Social Constructionism and Metaphor to Influence
the Leadership Perceptions of Graduate Business and Public Administration
Students**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

In *Mind and Matter*, Schrodinger (1958) stated that “every man’s world is and always remains a construct of his mind and cannot be proved to have any other existence” (p. 52). Statements like this prompt me to stop and reflect; in this case specifically upon the implications of such assertions for a world dominated by diverse communities and rapidly changing contexts as the one we are experiencing right now. Relationships are becoming increasingly connected, contexts and environments are in constant flux, and myopic approaches are proving unstable or untenable. Limited beliefs and perceptions are being challenged by demands for flexibility and inclusion.

Additionally, concepts and theories made evident to me through graduate study have led to much self-discovery, introducing many possibilities for researched exploration of concepts such as “constructionism” and “the power of metaphor,” which look beyond conventional explanations of how we each create our lived reality. For instance, Bishop, Foster and Jubala (as cited in Capper, 1993, pp. 173-202), discuss the concept of the social construction of disability in education, broadly inferring that the conceptualization of “disability” rests much more with the perceiver as a result of the boundaries and definitions established by society than it does with the individual who has been “labeled” as such. They contend that if the boundaries that define disability were broadened, we might discover those formerly perceived to be “disabled” were, in fact, just as “able” as all of those “non-disabled” people around them. To put it another way,

the authors are asserting that those we would refer to as disabled have been subjected to social construction; the perception of disability is non-existent without its established socially created and accepted parameters. Viewed from this perspective, disability is an empty label.

Thinking seriously about disability in this way was not only novel yet logical to me, it also seemed to be long overdue in the realm of mainstream educational and philosophical dialogue. Through personal reflection, I was prompted to ask questions about labels and definitions, about boundaries, assumptions and perceptions, and about “who decides and why” when it comes to the assignment of meaning in our society.

There have been a number of researchers who have explored the social construction of reality, in particular since the treatise *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann (1966) formally established the use of the epistemology in the field of sociology, and Kuhn (as cited in Patton, 2002) established the use of constructionism in the realm of science with the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The comparison of the perception “disability is essential” versus “disability is constructed” increased my personal interest in the concept of social constructionism, which is seen by scholars as a child of post-modernism¹, and led me to ask yet more questions about what we believe to be real.

For the purposes of this research, post-modernism is a concept first popularized by social theorist Lyotard (1984) after the translation of his book *The Postmodern*

¹ Social constructionism is seen by various theorists as embodying post-modern concepts like the questioning of assumptions and the validity of multiple perspectives. Under this framework, subjectivity is valued and inescapable. Constructionism is seen as having emerged as a result of post-modern thought.

Condition: A Report on Knowledge, which is based, in part, on his 1979 report to the Universities Council of the Government of Quebec. In this report, Lyotard indicated that the “big picture” view of society taken by modernism is being replaced with a “whole range of ‘competing small stories’...[which makes it] very hard to mount a modernist universal call for justice and truth when so many cannot agree over what these things are or indeed over whether they exist at all” (O’Farrell, 1999, p. 9). In essence, under postmodernism, subjectivity is elevated to primacy over objectivity, with the acknowledgement that multiple competing viewpoints are replacing the pursuit of any singular truth. In the case of this study, the embrace of subjectivity means that traditional understandings regarding leadership, and understandings about who is and who is not perceived to be leading, are seen as being called into question.

Contemplating social constructionism, particularly within the context of doctoral-level leadership research that is imbued with a concern for social justice, made me curious not only about what the implications of these subjectivity-based stances were for me personally, as well as for society in general, but also, more specifically, what the implications were for leaders and would-be leaders in particular. How might post-modern leadership educators and others concerned with leader preparation be able to alter leadership perceptions if leaders and leadership were socially constructed and thus had no “essential” nature or “inherent” properties? And, how could such alterations affect our society and its people in general?

As Gergen (1999) stated when discussing the failure of narrow, objective and modernist systems and called for new ways of understanding, “. . . the grand institutions

of science, religion, government, education - designed for the benefit of all - have not only fallen dramatically short of their aims, but often seem to generate oppression, environmental degrading, and armed warfare” (p. 4). We need leaders who recognize that the old systems, those that are grounded in individualism and selectivity, are no longer viable. In a time of “rapid and sweeping global change . . . how are we to go on when alien – even hostile – ways of life begin to replace those we hold dear?” (Gergen, 1999, p. 2). We need to begin thinking in new ways about all the things that we, up until now, may have taken for granted (O’Farrell, 1999), including what a leader is.

Morgan (1997) echoes the need to be able to question assumptions, in particular during times of rapid contextual flux like those we are experiencing in today’s highly globalized society. He stated, “in times of change it is vital to be in touch with the assumptions and theories that are guiding our practice and to be able to shape and reshape them for our different ends” (p. 376). Implicit in these statements is the notion that as leaders we must be fluid, and as teachers we must train future leaders. This is a classification that could conceptually include everyone under a social constructionist epistemology², in the value and need for such fluidity. Traditional leadership, management, and other perspectives often “lock us into fixed [perceptual] frameworks. They offer a way of seeing that in effect says, ‘this is THE WAY to see’. As a result, we often get trapped by the metaphors on which they are based” (Morgan, 1997, p. 376). Social constructionism, and as will be seen, metaphor and story-making, offer one way to

² Social constructionism appears in the literature in numerous forms and in varying degrees of “solidity”. A “pure social constructionist” would claim that the meaning of everything we know and experience, with no exceptions, is subjective and socially constructed, and that, in essence, a thing only exists because we “define” it into being.

escape this destructive myopia. Taking a constructionist approach allows us to see the value of learning about leadership by focusing on interactional processes. In examining how such processes influence leadership perceptions, we escape the focus on the traits, behaviors, and individual relationships of those engaged in it, as has been seen in many of the more “traditional” (for example, trait centered) leadership research approaches. We are able to realize that leadership emerges in a full range of ways, and that it is not confined to any singular context or approach, fully reliant on a multitude of specific and pre-defined personal traits, or subject to static and inflexible individual perceptions.

While he outlined what leadership “is and has been” in the twenty-first century, Drath (2001) suggested that many people are now confused about leadership and what, exactly, leaders “are”. In his view, this confusion is primarily due to the fact that our ways of both understanding one another and interrelating have changed so dramatically in recent years. He goes on to suggest that our perceptions of leadership have been handed down to us from the past, and are, essentially, now mismatched with the contexts that they exist within. He puts forward the idea, however, that traditional ways of perceiving leaders, which focused primarily on the fact that, within such a framework, “developing leadership becomes a matter of developing leader-like qualities in individuals” (p. xiv) was not necessarily an inappropriate approach. He stated that it “continues to make sense in any number of contexts – but is limited” (p. xiv). Since we now face any number of circumstances where understanding leadership simply as something a person possesses or “does” simply does not make sense, it is clear that the more traditional approaches may be too stunted to be workable or, worse yet, singularly embraced. Instead, we are

increasingly being called upon to perceive leaders and leadership as interactional, defining what these constructs are primarily by virtue of context, conversation and community. Societal complexity has necessitated a revolution of ideas and perceptions in how leadership is viewed (Sjostrand, Sandberg, & Tyrstrup, 2001).

Concept Transfer

It was fairly easy to transfer the concept of the social construction of disability to leadership. After all, is the term and concept of “leader” not also a label created by society; another socially constructed perception born of interaction, which does not actually exist without the individual and societal parameters that serve as its skeleton and skin? If you strip away the socially imbued meaning behind the word “leader” itself, is there anything left? Is there anything there that stands on its own, existing separately and distinctly from a specific context and a communally bestowed definition? After substantial research and contemplation, I find myself saying “no”. In social constructionist terms, just like was the case with disability, we may decide that “leader” is an empty label. And, from such emptiness, we can create brand new understandings, giving birth to innovative approaches and novel definitions of this (or any other) construct.

Facing the prime fallacy that social constructionists seek to address when debating those who hold opposite views about how reality is created³ (Burr, 2003), we find an argument based upon the “innate versus constructed” duality. Thus, to those who perceive that leadership is something that comes from “within”, perhaps an aspect of

³ Here, I am referring to those who advocate concepts like realism and essentialism, and those who favor predominantly positivist research approaches.

personality or some internal or genetic predisposition or gift, I would indicate that there has been some degree of misattribution. Burr further states that most concepts which society has assigned an internal locus are actually socially constructed and external, and that “most ‘personality’ words would completely lose their meaning if the person described were living alone on a desert island. Without the presence of other people, can a person, for example, be said to be friendly, shy, or caring”? (p. 32). Thus, could someone truly be considered to be a leader without a social environment and personal interactions? When removed from a relationship with others, is the concept of being a leader not just as meaningless as the concept of being “friendly”? Logic, grounded in a social constructionist epistemological framework and the post-modernist literature of the last half-century, would prompt us to answer “yes”. Thus, there is no such thing as a “leader” without a context and the social interactions that create one.

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

Bass (1990) provides us with an introduction to leadership study in a section titled “The Meaning of Leadership”, which presents a substantive overview of what the concept of leadership “is” (e.g., how it is defined, what it means, what characteristics it has). The outline provided there is based upon the large amount of research that has taken place on the subject of leaders and leadership during the last century. The section began by stating,

Although the Oxford English Dictionary (1933) noted the appearance of the word ‘leader’ in the English language as early at the year 1300, the word ‘leadership’ itself did not appear until the first half of the nineteenth century, and . . . that the word did not appear in most other modern languages until recent times.

Thus, we can clearly see not only the beginnings, but also the continuing evolutionary nature of leadership theory by examining Bass and Stogdill's (Bass, 1990) text.

Beginning in the early 1900's, leadership was seen as a focus of group processes, then as an aspect of "personality", then as the art of inducing compliance and/or of exercising influence, and moving on to leadership as an actual act or specific set of behaviors. Next on the leadership time-line came the view of leadership as a power relationship, then an instrument of goal achievement, followed by an explanation of leadership as an effect of followership. Most recently, leadership has been studied and defined as a "combination of elements" (Bass, 1990, pp. 11-19). The Bass and Stogdill introduction ends by concluding that leadership is an "evolving, expanding conceptualization", which agrees with Yukl (1981, p. 5) in that "leadership research should be designed to provide information relevant to the entire range of definitions, so that over time it will be possible to compare the utility of different conceptualizations and arrive at some consensus on the matter." Thus, at least among these specific but well-established leadership researchers, how leadership is defined, how it is perceived, and what it "is", is apparently left up to informed choice, guided by the purposes of the study, inquiry, or intervention, and subject to alteration based on more collective (vs. individual) group efforts.

Noticeably absent in the discussions above, and in most if not all of the mainstream leadership literature reviewed for this study, is the mention of the concept of the leader as a social construct, and of leadership as a socially constructed reality.

Theoretically, at least through the early 1990's, the closest related concept could be said

to be “leadership as an emerging effect of interaction” (Bass, 1990, p. 15), where leadership is seen as emerging from social processes. Here, at least, we see it established conceptually that a leader emerges as a result of social processes and collective action. However, leadership perceptions, at least as they are referred to here, never fully manifest themselves as the full-blown product of social interaction that will be put forward in this study under social constructionism; this description falls short because its theoretical base is not intentional but emergent and passive, and as Bass (1990) stated,

Although the authors probably did not mean to imply it, their definitions suggest that this quality amounts to little more than passive acceptance of the importance of one’s status. An individual often emerges as leader as a consequence of interactions within the group that arouse expectations that he or she, rather than someone else, can serve the group most usefully by helping it to attain its objectives (p. 16).

Additionally, while Chapter 30, “Space, Networks, Leadership and Its Substitutes” deals with things like physical and social arrangements, psycho-social distance and communication networks, and Chapter 34, “Leadership in Different Countries and Cultures” addresses issues of environment, cultural norms, and context differences, leadership is, once again, seen mostly as emergent; in these chapters it is linked more to passivity than to intention. In essence, leadership just happens by default during group processes, and leaders are perceived to be leaders by happenstance. However, intention is what we are interested in this study, and not passivity. If leadership perceptions are socially constructed and thus are “creatable” or “changeable”, we can seek ways to intentionally do so, and we can examine possible tools that could be used to assist a person in achieving this goal.

I have referenced Bass and Stogdill's work so often because it is seen in the leadership field as being highly comprehensive and representative of the literature and thought on the subject into the early 1990's. Thus it should be expected to provide a solid, reputable and respected, though admittedly partial, baseline against which to compare where it is we are going with where the field has been in the past, as well as make evident the niche we are trying to help fill with this study and others like it. It was not my intention to imply that *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership* (Bass, 1990) is fully representative of all current thinking on the subject of leadership, or that it embraces every nuance of leadership theory available, in particular because 17 years have passed since its publication. Leadership theory ranging from the past to the more contemporary is much too constrained. For example, Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967), Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey, 1984), as well as recent transactional and transformational models (Avolio & Bass, 2002), all remain too inflexible to be of optimum use as we move into an era of heightened interconnectedness; the requirements that accompany the understandings about leadership that they present remain too essentialist. I have used the Bass and Stogdill text (Bass, 1990) primarily to lay the groundwork that will allow me to make the following assertion; instead of asking questions like "under what conditions does leadership emerge?" and, "what qualities or traits define a leader?", perhaps current and future theorists, academics, and teachers ought to now be asking some very different questions? These questions should reflect the need for flexibility and the embracing of diversity that society is increasingly calling for in its leaders, its leadership theory and in its leader preparation programs.

Specifically examining the literature of the period between 1990 and 2007 shows that, while progress has been made with regard to post-modern and/or qualitative inquiry and the study of leadership, and more emergent and holistic theory has been found useful and holds great promise for the future, there is still work to be done. There remains a lack of leadership theory, research and leadership education approaches that operate from the premise that leaders and leadership are socially constructed realities, and that perceptions of these constructs can be altered. This, however, is changing too. Drath (2001) specifically uses the social constructionist theory of Gergen (1995) to study leaders and leadership, defining what he terms “relational leadership forms”. This is opposed to “personal leadership forms”, which focus on individualism and personal traits, a relational form focuses on “the whole system of relations . . . as the creative ground for leadership” (Drath, 2001, p. xv). In his research, Drath fully acknowledges that both leaders and followers are socially constructed and communal. The present inquiry was an attempt to extend research of this type, moving leaders and leadership study out of the confines of the individual, and into the arena of interaction, where leader and leadership perceptions can be seen as changeable and available to all those who seek them.

Sociologist Deutscher (as cited in Filstad, 1970) made the following statement when discussing qualitative (versus quantitative) methodology:

We knew that human behavior was rarely if ever influenced or explained by an isolated variable; we knew that it was impossible to assume that any set of such variables was additive (with or without weighting); we knew that the complex mathematics of the interaction among any set of variables was incomprehensible to us. In effect, although we knew they did not exist, we defined them into being (p. 33).

Deutscher's statement provides a summarization of the theoretical backbone that underlies this study; contrary to common understanding, we create, or, in Deutscher's terminology, we "define", our own reality. Thus, we define a leader into being just as we define disability into being. I say that this is contrary to our common understanding because contained in much of our current thinking, and indeed in how our everyday reality is constructed as well as the way that knowledge is created and shared, are concepts like "essentialism", "realism" and "objectivity". I agree with Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that "such a view of reality – so called objective reality – leaves out human aspects of reality, in particular the real perceptions, conceptions, motivations and actions that constitute most of what we experience" (p. 146). This allows us to ask just how real is a reality that does not take human perceptions, conceptions and motivations into account when asserting itself upon us? Are we to assume that each and every individual person around us has no effect on our reality and the perceptions of other people? And, that the filter of individual thoughts and actions, the very human generation of ideas and knowledge is not of any consequence for the reality that we have created? In addition, we can ask "what about history"? Are we not realistically tied to historical conditioning, having perceptions that are anchored in the past (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)? If you align yourself primarily with positivist-oriented concepts, specifically those anchored in essentialism, realism and objectivity, then adopting such viewpoints leads to the singular and myopic definitions of leadership indicated previously. For example, the concept that a leader has certain qualities that are innate or absolute, or the belief that a

person can do pre-defined and/or specific things and thus establish themselves as a leader within a given context.

The issue here is not one of truth or fiction regarding traditional concepts of leadership, but that anchoring leadership in an essentialist framework creates an unnecessary, and as will be revealed, also untrue, “either/or” dichotomy, making the role of leader available to some, but not to others, making it available in some situations but not in others. Leadership is then anchored at the extremes, and becomes hierarchical and exclusive. Is this necessarily the only way to conceive of the role of leader and the practice of leadership? Perhaps this is the type of question we are now being called upon to ask instead of searching for absolute truths, essential characteristics, or any form of objective facts about the subject.

The effort to move away from traditional realist and essentialist-based concepts of leaders and leadership, the effort to move away from objective inquiry and thus to re-define the role of leader as being available to everyone in any situation, is linked in this study by two primary concepts. The first, social constructionism, as touched upon earlier, serves as the epistemological base from which to begin examining this linkage. It serves as a lens; it assists us in seeing something, in this case it’s the constructed individual perceptions of leaders and leadership, in a novel way (Burr, 1995). This ability is, in itself, metaphorical in nature. The second is a tool (Morgan, 1997) that we can use to influence individual perceptions (the construct or subject of this study) of leaders and

leadership, and this tool will be referred to here as metaphorical story-making⁴. Prior to discussing the relationship between these two concepts, and before presenting any fully described theoretical base from which to further this inquiry, I will conduct a more in-depth exploration of three areas (social constructionism, metaphor and story-making) outlined above. Beginning with social constructionism, I will show how perceptions of leaders and leadership can be re-conceptualized and newly understood as malleable, constructs; I will establish how individual leadership perceptions are available for alteration. Then, moving on to metaphor, story-making and to creating a metaphor-based leadership story, I will show how the tool of metaphorical story-making allows perceptions of leaders and leadership to be created, enhanced, mitigated or destroyed. The section will conclude by discussing the linkages between the epistemology and the tool, providing a point from which to continue the study.

Statement of the Problem

The dominant leadership research paradigms are not based upon perceptions of leaders and leadership existing as pliable social constructions. The traditional approaches and theories tend to take a more individualistic or trait-based view. And, while many of the more recent theories are more collaborative in nature, they tend towards passivity, and/or do not embrace leadership as being the result of both interaction and discourse, but

⁴ Though metaphorical story-making is actually composed of two parts, metaphor and story-making, these two parts are highly complimentary, and as will be shown in this study, are perhaps even theoretical twins. I will argue that metaphors create stories by default.

simply explain it as the result of either one or the other. Thus, leadership perceptions are more limited, and may be seen as hierarchical, exclusive and inflexible.

The purpose of this study is to extend the research that utilizes a social constructionist epistemology in the study of leadership; it is seeking to discover if and how leadership perceptions can be altered by metaphorical story-making when it is intentionally used as a tool of discourse. As a social constructionist, I believe that the construct “leader”, as it applies to the individual, can be created, enhanced, mitigated or destroyed via interaction and language, and I would like to document the effect that the intentional use of the metaphor “leader as social construction” in story-making and focused group discussions has on individual leadership perceptions. I will explore how and in what ways the sharing of the “leader as social construction” metaphorical leadership story changes an individual’s understanding of what leaders and leadership “are”; making obvious the highly pliable nature of the perceptual construct, and allowing it to be seen as available to everyone in all contexts in which they might find themselves. As Drath (2001) indicated:

If a person is not a leader simply on his or her own but as a result of participation in some relational process, then we have a new and potentially powerful tool for recognizing leadership and for making it happen. We need not confine ourselves to teaching, training and developing individuals to become leaders (although we will want to do this as well), we can begin to teach, train, and develop whole communities, whole groups, whole organizations, in how to participate in various leadership processes . . . (p. 150).

Thus, leadership educators, theorists and practitioners would be wise to pay attention to the social and relational aspects of leadership, and should begin to move away from discussions about leaders and leadership that focus on the individual and the essential.

Research Question

A two-part research question guided this study: (1) to what extent and (2) in what way(s) were individual business and public administration graduate students' perceptions of leaders and leadership altered (along a "flexible/inflexible" continuum) by the intentional use of the metaphor "leader as social construction" in focused group discussions?

Definitions of Key Terms & Concepts

The eighteen terms and definitions outlined below are important to a full understanding of the theoretical linkage upon which this study was based. Each term has or will be used repeatedly throughout this dissertation. They are included here as a reference for the reader.

Conceptualization/Conceptual System – The overarching theme under which multiple concepts are ordered. An example would be to state "My conceptualization of a leader is . . ." followed by a list of applicable descriptors and characteristics.

Constructivism/Social Constructivism – A theory that proposes that each individual mentally constructs the world of experience. Like constructionism, it places emphasis on human construction of what we understand to be "real". However, for constructivists the process of creating what is real takes place within the individual, while for constructionists it is the outcome of social relationships (Gergen, 1999) and interaction. Under constructivism, meaning making is individual (Patton, 2002) and not collective; the individual mind constructs reality

within a systematic relationship to the external world. Proponents include Jean Piaget (1955) and George Kelly (1955).

Discourse – This term is used primarily in two senses: (1) to refer to a systematic, coherent set of images, metaphors, and so on that construct an “object” in a particular way, and (2) to refer to the actual spoken interchanges between people (Burr, 1995). The former definition has been used in this study.

Empiricism – The view that the only valid knowledge is that which is derived from observation and experiment (Burr, 1995). Associated with Positivism.

Entailment – Connection(s) between metaphorical concepts. For example, the metaphorical concepts “time is money”, “time is a resource”, and “time is a valuable commodity” form a single system based on sub-categorizations, since in our society money is a limited resource and limited resources are valuable commodities. These sub-categorized relationships characterize entailments between the metaphors: “time is money” entails that “time is a limited resource”, which entails that “time is a valuable commodity” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Epistemology – The philosophy of knowledge; the study of the nature of knowledge and the methods of obtaining it (Burr, 1995). An Epistemology is a way of knowing. The Epistemology of Social Constructionism holds that knowledge is socially constructed and interactional.

Essentialism – The view that objects (including people) have an essential, inherent nature that can be observed (Burr, 1995). This view surmises that things exist apart from

any social relationships. Opposites are things such as relativism, constructivism, and constructionism.

Experientialism - An alternative to both objectivism and subjectivism (both of which contradict the known facts about human thought since they are extremes on a continuum). Holds that truth is always relative to understanding, which is based on a non-universal conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Aspects of both objectivism and subjectivism are embraced.

Gestalt/Experiential Gestalts – Way(s) of organizing experiences into structured wholes. These add to the coherent nature of our conversations, thoughts, etc. They are “multidimensional-structured wholes” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) that take several metaphoric entailments and merge them into a new form, creating novel and broad understanding(s) for individuals.

Instances of Metaphor – The use of metaphoric descriptors in conversation and writing (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Metaphor/Metaphorical Concepts – Understanding, seeing, or experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). An example of a metaphorical concept would be to state that “time is money”.

Metaphorical Story-Making⁵ – The creation of a story based on a metaphor or multiple metaphors. Examples can be found in Morgan (1997). In this instance, stories are created around particular metaphors, for example looking at “organizations as cultures” lends itself to a particular story-based descriptive framework.

⁵ The author of this dissertation originated this term.

Objectivism – Asserts the validity of objective phenomena over that of subjective experience (<http://www.m-w.com/>). Associated with Empiricism and Positivism.

Personification – The representation of inanimate objects or abstract ideas as living beings, as in the sentences "Necessity is the mother of invention," or "Lean famine stalked the land," (<http://www.m-w.com/>). It is a metaphorical tool.

Post Modernism – The rejection of “grand narratives” in theory (Lyotard, 1984) and the replacement of a search for truth with a celebration of the multiplicity of (equally valid) perspectives (Burr, 1995). Emerged as a response to the enlightenment and modernist philosophy, and the term is attributed originally to Jean Francois Lyotard (1984).

Relativism – The view that there can be no singular ultimate truth, and that therefore all perspectives are equally valid (Burr, 1995). Its opposites are essentialism, realism and concepts that are associated with positivist research approaches.

Social Constructionism – An epistemology with a primary emphasis on interaction and discourse as the vehicles through which self and the world are articulated, understood and created. Meaning and reality are determined collectively (Patton, 2002). It has four primary characteristics: (1) it takes a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge, (2) it involves historical and cultural specificity (advocates that all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative), (3) it indicates that knowledge is sustained by social processes, and (4) it maintains that knowledge and social action go hand in hand (Burr, 1995). The definition as used here comes from the realm of sociology and psychology, and is

closely identified with Berger and Luckmann (1966), Gergen (1999), and Burr (1995). It is discussed, along with constructivism, by Patton (2002) as one of the eight theoretical traditions in qualitative inquiry.

Subjectivism - A doctrine that individual feeling or apprehension is the ultimate criterion of the good and the right (<http://www.m-w.com/>). Conclusions are to be based on experience and individual perceptions versus empirical data. Its opposite is objectivism.

Theoretical Base and Assumptions

Social constructionism is not a theory to be applied, nor a thing that serves to explain any type of result or concept⁶. It is, however, a starting point from which to examine something like leadership; it is an epistemological position that aims to shed light upon the ways in which virtually all day-to-day phenomena are socially constructed and are the natural result of discourse and our interactions with other people. This epistemology removes (relocates) problems, concepts, or perceptions away from the individual, and defines them differently, “placing them directly into the realm of discourse, social relations, and the contextual decisions of the majority” (Burr, 2003, p. 9). Thus, this is the direct opposite of the essentialist viewpoint held by, for example, traditional psychology, which seeks to locate the problem, concept or perception more within the individual. It is also an expansion upon the assertions of sociology, which

⁶ Social constructionism is considered to be an epistemology, or a way of acquiring knowledge. As used in this study, it specifies that knowledge acquisition is interactional and collaborative. The definition is socio-psychological in origin. See *Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts* above for additional information.

generally credits social structures (not interactions) as primarily responsible for our personal attributions and understandings (Burr, 2003).

Several researchers in different fields have used a social constructionist epistemology in their studies. For example, Rogers (2003) has researched the social construction of stigma; Spillane, Hallett and Diamond (2003) studied how teachers construct influential others as leaders on the basis of society valued forms of human, cultural, social and economic capital; and Neumann (1995) used a social constructionist perspective to study the management of financial resource stress among college presidents, examining how they can inadvertently create or negate “financial hard times” simply through their communicative behavior. Arsenault (1999) even used the social constructionist perspective to investigate the workings of charismatic leadership, adding depth to the subject areas that have utilized this epistemology in their research, and making clear the potential span of this perspective. It can be said that the use of social constructionism is becoming integrated into social science, psychological and education research at an increasing rate.

Lambert et al. (1995) combines social constructivism (which is similar to constructionism, though it locates reality creation within the individual and not the group), education, leadership theory and the use of metaphor when she writes about new ideas for leader preparation in their book *The Constructivist Leader*, within a framework based on research by Walker (1994) and pioneering work in education done at California State University [CSU], Hayward. Lambert notes that “this [CSU] work shifted the focus from the technical preparation of school administrators to developing constructivist

leadership understandings for those in formal and informal leadership roles” (p. 172).

Though Lambert was dealing with constructivism and we are dealing with constructionism, the concepts are similar enough to provide some insight into the value and use of such epistemological tools that their reference here is applicable (see the section *Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts* in this chapter for more on social constructivism) to this study. For example, one recommendation made as a result of the work done at CSU Hayward is that story creation and metaphor use be integrated into each student’s development of themselves as an educational leader. Lambert et al. (1995) states, “using their story, students formulate a personal leadership metaphor that becomes an organizing device and also a way of giving them insight into their own personal leadership style . . . [it] provides students with a personal reference point from which to question their assumptions about leadership and gain a sense about themselves as leaders in a learning community” (p. 175). This succinctly summarizes what our goal is in this study as well. According to Lambert et al. (1995), such a proposal openly embraces several of the main tenets of a social constructivist epistemology, which is grounded in a way very similar to that of social constructionism. For example, it questions objectivity and assumptions, it acknowledges the situational and social process orientation of what a leader is, and by implication acknowledges perceptions as constructed, as it illustrates how knowledge and action go hand-in-hand (in realizing that a leader is a social construction an individual can take action to enhance or diminish their position as such, and thus a person can be said to be “positioned” for action by knowledge).

Given the ideas just described, I was led to ask what the true power of the use of metaphorical story-making is in helping us build the construct-entity we have come to call a “leader?” If, as Burr (2003) stated, “knowledge is not seen [by social constructionism] as something that a person has or doesn’t have, but as something that people do together” (p. 9), we are left with the realization that leadership perceptions are, in fact, social constructs, and as such, are something that can be created, enhanced, mitigated, or destroyed using tools of discourse like metaphorical story-making. The linkage between leadership perceptions, social constructionism and metaphorical story-making was examined in-depth in this study.

Research Design

Social constructionism was the general theoretical framework upon which this study was based. The overall research design that was imposed over this constructionist framework was one of comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As a general qualitative method, comparative analysis is useful in both verifying and generating formal theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which was a goal of this research. Additionally, and more specifically, since social constructionism holds that meaning is generated collectively (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999) and that subjectivity is valued (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen 1999), and since we are interested in studying changes in perceptions (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005), the research design utilized in this study included methods that embrace all of these tenets: Q-Methodology and focus groups. These primarily qualitative methods (Q-Methodology does have a quantitative component) were integrated, with Q-Sort data providing measurement of subjective

individual leader and leadership perceptions (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005) both before and after moderator (researcher) led focused group discussions centering on the “leaders as social constructions” metaphorical story. The focus groups generated emergent data, allowing both participant subjectivity and collective meaning-making to be evidenced (Morgan, 1988). Additionally, all Q-Sort participants completed written interviews to gather further data regarding their “extreme” rankings of the Q-Sort statements that were provided to them. This added depth to the Q-Sort perception measurement data, and complimented the data generated by the focus groups.

Methods of Data Collection

Data for this study were collected in several ways. First, subjective perception data was generated using Q-Methodology (Brown, 1993; van Exel & de Graaf, 2005). Here, study participants were asked to rank-order a set (known as a Q-Set) of researcher provided statements; in the case of this study, these statements focused on individual perceptions of leaders and leadership running along the “flexible” to “inflexible” continuum, since more flexible understandings of leaders and leadership were deemed important in increasingly interconnected contexts at the outset of this study. This data was collected from those participating in a focus group event both before and after the event occurred, allowing both pre and post focus group perceptions to be revealed.

Secondly, all study participants individually completed written interviews prepared by the researcher regarding the “extreme” rankings of their Q-Set statements (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005). This allowed further, more illustrative and in-depth probing

of participant perceptions to be documented, with pre and post focus group perception comparisons made, discussed and elaborated upon.

Lastly, data was collected within the focus groups themselves (though it was considered a tertiary data source), emerging from moderator (researcher) led focused group discussions around the topic of leadership perceptions, metaphor and story-making. The metaphorical story “leader as social construction” was discussed. This allowed participant subjectivity to emerge, while also permitting collective meaning making to occur around the specific, designated topics.

Data Analysis

Analysis of study data was done both by hand (in the case of focus group and Q-Sort supplemental written interview data) and, in the case of the Q-Sort data itself, by the Q-Methodology data analysis computer program PQMethod (Schmolck & Atkinson, n.d.). This software analyzed the data (specifically identifying consensus statements) that had been input and then provided detailed profiles of each participant’s Q-Sort rankings. The final Q-Sort profile that was created reflected individual pre and post focus group leadership perceptions for each participant.

Focus group data (tertiary) was narrative, and was content analyzed to discover patterns in individual leadership perceptions/understandings.

Q-Sort supplemental written interview data was sought after the second Q-Sort administration from all the participants regarding the Q-Set statements that they ranked at each extreme (most agree and most disagree) in each of the two Q-Sort exercises (pre and

post). Participants were asked to elaborate on their extreme rankings, and their pre- and post-rankings were compared and discussed.

Written interview data were paired with Q-Sort data to provide not only a description of the individual's subjective perceptions about leadership which were discovered through the Q-Sort itself, but a more detailed picture about why each participant ranked the Q-Sort statements positioned at each of the extremes as they did. This revealed the areas of strongest feeling for each participant. Combined with focus group data, a final profile was then created that reflected how perceptions have (or have not) changed for each individual.

Role of the Researcher

This primarily qualitative study acknowledged the role of the researcher and accepted that the design of the study, ranging from methodology through focus group moderation and data analysis, was influenced to some degree by the exercise of the researcher's own subjective beliefs, perceptions and definitions. However, this interplay is not one-sided; the researcher may also be influenced throughout the process by the participants involved in the study. Thus, the study evolved to some degree as it progressed. Both post-modernism (Lyotard, 1984) and social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1999) are seen as accepting of this mutual relationship. Since meaning is generated collectively, and there is a denial of any singular truth (O'Farrell, 1999), and subjectivity is unavoidable (Gergen, 1999), this mutual-influence was not problematic for this study in any way. Throughout this study, understanding and meaning

were made only through interaction and collaboration, and all viewpoints were considered equally valid (i.e., there was no singular truth to be found).

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, a discussion of the conceptual underpinnings of the study, the statement of the research problem, the presentation of the research questions, and a discussion of the theoretical base and assumptions that are implicit in the study. Finally, it concludes with sections briefly highlighting the research design, the methods of data collection and data analysis, and by describing the role of the researcher in the study.

Chapter 2 is comprised of a review of the related discourses, and is divided into four primary sections. It starts with an examination of social constructionism, where the epistemology in use in the study is explicated and its application to leadership is detailed. This is followed by examinations of both metaphor and story-making, which are described as tools that can be used to influence constructed leadership perceptions. It concludes by formally establishing the linkage between the epistemology (social constructionism), and the tool(s) that can be used (metaphorical story-making) to influence the constructs (leaders and leadership perceptions) that emerge from their use.

Chapter 3 includes a restatement of the research problem, and will introduce the ways that I will attempt to address the two-part research question. This chapter begins by focusing on the research design and methodology generally, providing an introduction to the techniques utilized throughout the study. The unit of analysis for the study is also described. This is followed by an in-depth examination of both Q-Methodology and focus

groups. Next, the general research procedures are outlined for the three data gathering methods used: Q-Methodology, interviews and focus groups. The chapter ends by presenting a model for the research methods in use in the study, and discussing data analysis methods.

Chapter 4 presents the findings, with a detailed description of the data that emerged as a result of the study, and data-based findings will be presented and examined.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, details the conclusions that were reached, describes implications for educators and policy that emerged, and addresses the limitations of the study. It also presents possibilities for future research that came to light as a result of the study's findings. The references and appendices follow this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED DISCOURSES

Introduction

This study investigated individual leadership perceptions and described a tool of influence that can be used when those perceptions were seen as socially constructed. From a perspective that viewed the role of “leader” and the broader conceptualization of “leadership” as products of social interaction, this study examined if and how the tool of metaphorical story-making (using the metaphor “leader as social construction” in a focus group environment) influenced individual understanding of the constructs along a “flexible versus inflexible” continuum, as described in Chapter 1.

The review of the related discourses¹ (Piantanida & Garman, 1999) that follows starts out by broadly examining the epistemology of social constructionism, which is the foundation that this study is based upon. The review begins by placing constructionism in a historical context, and then describes in more detail how it contributes to the creation of both our individual and collective realities. It focuses specifically on the social construction of leaders and leadership, relating them to “real world” action (i.e., it shows how our socially constructed reality affects our actions and how we operate within a

¹ Piantanida and Garman (1999) prefer the term “Review of Relevant Discourses” to “Review of Literature” for several reasons. I have adapted their concept for use here. Primarily, they wish to escape the notion of “*the* review of *the* literature”, which implies complete comprehensiveness, and is somewhat exclusionary in that it ignores the idea that study-relevant discourses can be found outside the body of formal theoretical literature. “Review of Relevant Discourses” is more inclusive, and therefore agrees with the post modern and social constructionist framework upon which this study is based, since both value inclusion and see all perspectives as equally valid.

given context or environment). Here, the epistemology is grounded in real world practice.

The review then progresses through the constructionism-metaphor-story making linkage by examining the research on metaphor and story-making individually, displaying the complementary nature of the concepts, and showing how they can be used jointly to alter individual perceptions of leaders and leadership. The creation of this linkage allows leaders and leadership to be seen as pliable social constructions which are given life through interaction and language, and are therefore available to everyone. This understanding runs counter to more traditional leadership metaphor(s) that focus on narrower, primarily individualistic, essential or inherent traits and characteristics. The section concludes by elaborating on the linkage as a whole, and discusses its importance as established through the discourse review that has been conducted in this chapter.

Reality is Subjective; Literature on Social Constructionism

“[We must] appreciate the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important – an appreciation which becomes possible only when one’s aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description.”

(Rorty, as cited in Gergen, 1999, p. 62)

Numerous researchers in recent decades have used a social constructionist epistemology as a base from which to examine concepts, practices, perceptions, constructs and behaviors, among other things. For example, Meindl appearing in Dansereau and Yammarino (1998) used social constructionism to research leadership, looking at leadership as being “follower-centric”, that is, something that is socially constructed between followers and leaders. Leadership in this case is primarily an

outcome of group social processes, and does not exist otherwise. As a result of his investigations using a social constructionist base, Meindl (1998) indicates, “manipulations of contexts and constructions, rather than of leader behaviors, would, in a sense, constitute the practice of leadership” (p. 289). He concluded that it seems not only to be an available epistemological framework with which to study leadership, but one that is in fact necessary and desirable for researchers to use. He indicated that we should strive to “return leadership study to a focus on what actors and observers construct as a normal part of their social experiences” (p. 297).

Applying a social constructionist framework to leadership in management, Sjostrand, Sandberg, and Tyrstrup (2001) studied how managers are one of several groups that construct organizational leadership for employees. They viewed managerial leadership as being primarily interactional, aiming to explain, in particular, how small-talk serves to structure organizational reality and influence leadership perceptions among employees in several Scandinavian and German companies. Their findings have shown that managerial leadership has moved beyond the notion of existing primarily in the work context (that is, directly within organizations themselves), and now resides more within personal interactions, which, in many cases, actually occur outside of the formal organizational setting. These more formal settings have been the dominant areas examined in previous constructionist-based leadership research projects, if and when interaction and social influences were examined at all.

While the philosophical basis out of which social constructionism evolved conceptually dates back several hundred years, the concept in use here refers to a school

of thought and an epistemological position that was greatly expanded upon in the 1950's and 1960's by researchers such as Wittgenstein (1958) and Schutz (1967). It was introduced into the field of sociology (note that social constructionism emerged into different fields at different times, and has been represented by different researchers accordingly) by Berger and Luckmann (1966) with the publication of their book *The Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. In this book, the authors provide an in-depth introduction to the concept of social construction, discuss its implications, and provide a historically grounded theoretical base from which to examine how reality is created for each one of us. It was not until constructionist theory was introduced into science, however, that it became a truly “influential methodological paradigm” (Patton, 2002, p. 99). This influence began to be felt with the 1970 publication of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Patton (2002) indicated,

Before Kuhn, most people thought that science progressed through heroic individual discoveries that contributed to an accumulating body of knowledge that got closer and closer to the way the world really worked. In contrast, Kuhn argued [that] . . . ideas that seemed to derive from brilliant individual scientific minds were actually shaped by and dependent on paradigms of knowledge that were socially constructed and enforced through group consensus (p. 99).

Here, Kuhn is explicitly removing (for the first time) scientific advancement from the individual and relocating it directly into the collective. This relocation was seen as a “critical case” (Patton, 2002) for social constructionism, since, if scientific knowledge is socially created and validated in a community, as opposed to consisting of individually generated and empirically-based discovery that is anchored in the natural world, then “surely all knowledge is socially constructed” (Patton, 2002, p. 99).

Social constructionism's main roots can be traced back to three developments in nineteenth century German thought: the Marxian, the Nietzschean, and the Historicist, with Historicist thought seen as being expressed in the works of Wilhelm Dilthey, who discussed the "relativity of all perspectives on human events" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 7). The sociology of knowledge, which is concerned with everything that passes as "knowledge" in any given group or society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), is defined as the study of how we come to acquire information and understanding, and is the area within the field of sociology where social constructionism resides. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated:

The theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is "real" for members of a society. Since this is so, the sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people "know" as "reality" in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives. In other words, commonsense "knowledge" rather than "ideas" must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. It is precisely this "knowledge" that constitutes the fabric meanings without which no society could exist (p. 15).

According to these authors then, the "sociology of knowledge must concern itself with the social construction of reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 15). To summarize, Berger and Luckmann put forth the notion that knowledge is socially created and distributed, and how that distribution occurs lends itself to study, and, in fact, to becoming a discipline unto itself; a discipline fixed, in this particular case, within the field of sociology. Thus, the sociology of knowledge is the sociological sub-discipline that examines how knowledge is socially distributed. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) succinctly indicated; "how is it possible that human activity . . . should produce a world of things . . ." (p. 18), thus implying that our reality is created (it is "produced"), and is

the result of our interactions with one another and with our environment. Reality is thus both interactional and contextual. Berger and Luckmann have argued that the everyday life we know is not something that has meaning, or even existence, outside of social contexts. It is, rather, something that is meaningful to us primarily by way of others. This is in agreement with Schutz (1967) who indicated that “Only a very small part of my knowledge of the world originates within my personal experience . . . the typifying medium par excellence by which socially derived knowledge is transmitted is the vocabulary and syntax of everyday language” (p. 14). Thus, not only is knowledge socially derived (constructed), that knowledge is also shared primarily via our interactions and communications with other people.

The most significant vehicle used in our interactions with one another every day is language in all its forms; be it through talking, reading and writing, or through body-language, communication is paramount to understanding since knowledge is socially distributed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schutz, 1967). In fact, numerous researchers over the years have examined how socially created definitions of management (and leadership) stipulated that communication is a highly significant factor in the formation of those definitions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984; Mead, 1934; Weber, 1947). For Berger and Luckmann, “everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen” (1966, p. 37). An understanding of the influence of language, and its multiple dynamic effects, is therefore crucial to an understanding of the reality of our everyday lives. Here is found the notion that creative capacity is embedded directly in language (Berger & Luckmann, 1966); “Put simply,

through language, an entire world can be actualized at any moment” (p. 39) and “language constructs immense edifices of symbolic representations that appear to tower over the reality of everyday life like gigantic presences from another world” (p. 40). Thus, it is through our interactions with others, through our conversations and communications themselves, that “constructs” of various kinds, be they concrete like mountains, or abstractions like disability or leadership, develop and have meaning for each of us.

Implicit in Berger and Luckmann’s assertion regarding the power of construction is that this power is available to everyone, and is not simply something that “happens”. Thus, construct creation is not at all passive, but is a tool that can be called upon to alter reality at any time and by anyone. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), “While it is possible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man constructs himself” (p. 49). All this being said, also implicit is the fact that, even when guided by the epistemology just established, individuals do not operate in a vacuum. We construct our own nature via our interactions with others and through our very real physical operations within our direct environment(s); reality is something that we create together, and is a fully social enterprise (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 51).

In sum, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966) and other researcher-theorists (see Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999; Schutz, 1967) it is by working together that we create reality for ourselves and for one another, and this creation encompasses all the possible facets of everyday life. Logically then, one could argue that we actively create and

destroy, we actively order, define, structure, and program, we actively make the abstract “real” and the incomprehensible understandable, all in the course of our relations with other people. Collectively we produce the “mainstream” and legitimate what we choose to label as such, we select norms and ideals to live by, and we assure that these norms are as fluid and static as is necessary for us, and are provided to the next generation virtually without their realization that it is being done (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Some researchers have even stated that it is not primarily reality creation that occupies us as a people, but it is reality re-creation on which we spend a majority of our time and energy, since little of what we create is truly original to us alone (Sjostrand, Sandberg & Tyrstrup, 2001).

Unfortunately, even though everything we generally know as real is the result of such mediated construction, “Habitualization and institutionalization in themselves limit the flexibility of human actions” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 116). According to this perspective, being as embedded in an essentialist and realism dominated society that praises objectivity and seeks a singular truth as many of us are, the notion of inflexibility should not be surprising. For each of us, reality is socially defined, but the definitions are always embodied; in other words, flesh and blood individuals working in conjunction with one another serve as definers of reality (Berger & Luckmann, p. 116). Thus, our creative powers are actually solidly grounded in our real life interactions with others, and touch upon virtually all facets of the world around us. Our humanness tends to limit as much as free us. Under constructionism, we are not dealing with the ethereal, but an ability grounded in real-world practice to change our perceptions, recreating reality in

part or in whole, and allowing flexible understandings to emerge. For example, Morgan (1997), using a metaphorical lens to examine organizations as cultures, noted how “organizations are socially constructed realities” (p. 120), and stated that such a view “can be important in empowering people to take greater responsibility for their world by recognizing that they play an important part in constructing their realities” (p. 152). By virtue of such statements, I am led to ask just how empowering it might be for individuals to realize that they can construct themselves as leaders. Our own perceptions are positioning us to act, and to take part in “real life” in a physical sense, and acquiring tools that will allow us to alter those perceptions, in essence redefining what we know to be “real”, is an extremely powerful realization.

In Chapter 1, I anchored the call for seeing leadership in a new way in the concept of a pluralistic society, one that embraces diversity in all forms and advocates in a balanced fashion in the interests of all. Pluralistic societies have what Berger and Luckmann call a “shared core universe” (1966, p. 125). They go on to indicate that “Pluralism encourages both skepticism and innovation, and is thus inherently subversive of the taken for granted reality of the traditional status quo” (p. 125). The point here is that we need to go beyond the taken for granted definitions of everyday constructs, like that of leader, and think in new and more creative terms that are in accord with a subjective, relativistic, holistic and pluralistic society. This effort may involve utilizing a newer and less traditional epistemology, one like social constructionism, with which to perceive and understand our everyday reality and the constructs that compose it. When

we do so, we are allowed to question the status quo because, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated:

Every individual is born into an objective social structure within which he encounters the significant others who are in charge of his socialization. These significant others are imposed upon him. Their definitions of his situation are posited for him as objective reality. He is thus born into not only an objective social structure but also into an objective social world. The significant others who mediate this world to him modify it in the course of mediating it. They select aspects of it in accordance with their own location in the social structure, and also by virtue of their individual, biographically rooted idiosyncrasies. The social world is “filtered” to the individual through this double selectivity (p. 131).

Following this rationale, questioning is both necessitated and legitimated because of the nature of our socialization processes. Due to the structure of our society and the way that knowledge, from the most basic to the most complex, is shared and assimilated, the individual not only has the roles and viewpoints of others directly placed upon him or her, but in the process of socialization actually takes on the life-world of another person (or persons). This phenomenon is not limited by culture, geographic location, or time, though it may manifest itself in different forms and varying strengths. We each learn to accept a prescribed reality that, at the very least, partially structures our lives. Over time, this reality is internalized, as seen when Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated:

Society, identity, and reality are subjectively crystallized in the same process of internalization. This crystallization is concurrent with the internalization of language. Indeed, for reasons evident from the foregoing observations on language, language constitutes both the most important content and the most important instrument of socialization (p. 133).

If language and interaction create reality, it logically follows that we can also use language to re-socialize ourselves, if not in toto, then in part, redefining some aspect of our reality, or altering some construct according to different and perhaps self-selected

precepts. We could, in essence, decide to construct ourselves as leaders, and do so according to the tenets that we ourselves select, and make real through social processes. Supportive of this is the idea that Berger and Luckmann (1966) indicate is the most important vehicle we use to maintain (and create) reality, conversation. This idea is also in agreement with the understanding that individuals can, indeed, break-out of the “objective” reality imposed upon them by society, and create a new version for themselves, and that doing so is anchored not only in language, but in social interaction. It would seem that reality is truly neither static nor stable, nor is it existent apart from our interactions with other people; ultimately reality is highly pliable.

Our social world is available for alteration, and all constructs within that world . are open to change. Thus, my hypothesis in this study is that our understandings of leaders are available for construction and reconstruction; they are changeable and adaptable because they are socially constructed. Morgan (1997) indicated that “powerful leaders seem to symbolize so many aspects of their organization. But it is really important to recognize that formal leaders do not have any monopoly on the ability to create shared meaning” (pp. 136-137). In essence, the exercise of leadership is available to anyone despite a formal designation or label; leadership is socially constructed and lies outside any notion of what “should be”. Often, when questioned adequately, as can easily be seen in the case of disability, a label will simply disappear.

Since there has historically been a lack of research utilizing a social constructionist framework since there is all too often a lack of a clear articulation of the assumptions that underlie the epistemology (Hacking, 1999), which leads to confusion

and misunderstanding, this study will actively guard against this. Thus, the assumptions upon which our view of social constructionism is based will be made quite evident before proceeding.

Burr (2003) identifies four basic assumptions (see Appendix A – *Assumptions of a Social Constructionist Epistemology* for an expanded list) of a social constructionist epistemological position. First, it takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge; second, it establishes historical and cultural specificity; third, it sustains knowledge through social processes (particularly discourse); and fourth it asserts that knowledge and action go together (i.e., discourse positions actors). Thus, using a social constructionist epistemology, a high level of subjectivity is evident when examining any construct, whether it is the disabled or the leader serving as the subject of the examination. We see that the existence of any absolute definition, the existence of any essential truth regarding a designation or construct is quickly called into question, and, as a “pure” social constructionist might assert, is in fact completely impossible to find. Essentially, there is no “right” position to adopt since by following the logic of the four basic assumptions of constructionism outlined above, we are left with a subjective, historically and culturally specified discourse-generated examinee. As a post-modernist epistemology, social constructionism rejects the notion of any “overarching orderly schema and explanation . . . [and it] frees society at least to some extent from the tyranny of one voice, one ideology, and one set of meanings” (O’Farrell, 1999, p. 6). Post modernism, of which, as indicated previously, social constructionism is a part, is seen as being another lens that, according to Morgan (1997),

. . . thrives on paradox, and the relativism of competing points of view. It emphasizes how in opening horizons and perspectives we also close others, and how the attempt to gain particular kinds of insights or ‘truths’ inevitably leads to distortions (p. 429).

In essence then, we can only ever view a construct like leadership in shadow since we have no genuine access to an objective reality, and we are always subjects who “engage objective realities subjectively” (Morgan, 1997, p. 429). As will be demonstrated in the next section of this literature review, metaphor has theoretical and real-world practical capacities very similar to those ascribed to post modernism and social constructionism, making them very compatible components for use in this study.

This review is not an attempt to assert the value of any particular social construct, or to critique and debate the social constructionist epistemology itself. Social constructionism is highly complex, existing as it does at different levels, such as those of “light” and “dark”, and “strong” or “weak” (O’Farrell, 1999). This discussion is more of an attempt to show how adopting this specific epistemology, and thus showcasing a specific social construct, in this case the one known to us as “leader”, can enhance or diminish that construct by prompting the actor to take or avoid taking certain actions or to participate in or avoid participating in certain activities. As a construct that fully owes its existence to individual and socially defined parameters, communicated through discourse, and anchored in context, a leader can be created (constructed) or destroyed (deconstructed) using the tools central to social constructionism; interaction and language (discourse). The use of the terms language and discourse in this case refer to both the spoken and the written word, and encompass all the methods that people use to

communicate with one another on a daily basis. Burr (2003) commented skillfully on the power and nature of discourse when she stated,

A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light. If we accept the view . . . that . . . a multitude of alternative versions of events are potentially available through language, this means that surrounding any one object, event, person, etc, there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the object [or construct] in question, a different way of representing it to the world (p. 64).

Thus, we see in evidence here, not only commentary on discourse that is of a general nature, but specific mention of the use of story and metaphor in the creation of a construct, and direct inference to the power of language and discourse to create alternate versions of reality. As a socially constructed perception, leadership is directly affected by language and discourse.

In the field of psychology, the concept of social constructionism goes back to Gergen (1973), where we find the first major assertions (within the field) that are promoting the concept that all knowledge is historically and culturally specific. Additionally, during this time, another important and complimentary assertion was made; there is no point in looking for any one particular “truth”, since social life is continually changing and thus, so are the meanings that are associated with words, concepts and explanations (Gergen, 1973). Truth was seen as individually created, ever evolving, and fully related to culture and to context.

At the same time that Gergen was writing here in the United States, Harre (as cited in Burr, 2003) was writing in the United Kingdom, and implied that language has a

role that is more substantial than that of being a simple tool used to describe things, and he asserted that language is a valid social resource for constructing varied accounts of the world and of events. Language was seen as being a way of attributing meaning, and of building a personal version of reality; one that is subject to change or remain fixed according to the pressures applied by the majority (or, in the case of this study and those like it, according to the personal wishes or needs of the individuals or groups involved).

As an epistemology, social constructionism's proponents call upon us to question, to analyze and to ascertain the truth for ourselves. We are asked, once again, to take a pluralistic view that embraces the simultaneous existence of multiple versions of reality, and to see that there is really no single, over-arching way of defining anything, be it disability, a mountain, or constructs like leaders or leadership. As O'Farrell (1999) asserts in her embrace of post-modernism,

Perhaps we need to go beyond the notion of any rigidly fixed social identities, no matter how counter-cultural these might be, and to engage in an on-going and open-ended process of negotiation. The aim of this negotiation would not be the kind of vague consensus which is the modernist ideal, but a negotiation which recognizes (rather than merely tolerates) differences of all kinds and not simply those which are the current flavour of the month . . . instead of using education to train students to calmly accept their fate as specialized and highly regulated workers . . . students should be invited at every possible opportunity to consider and imagine alternative scenarios no matter how seemingly impractical (p. 6).

Here we see a direct challenge, matching Morgan's (1997) discussed earlier, to go well beyond the normal and accepted parameters evidenced by modernist conceptual systems, be they in education or elsewhere, and are given direction to establish new techniques which will be applied in new ways. Here, we are given the power to create both ourselves

and one another, and to explore all the diversity that surrounds this creation, seeing it all as valuable, possible and changeable.

Chapter 3 of Gergen's (1999, pp. 62-89) text is titled "Discourse and Emancipation", which is itself a reference to the ability of language (discourse) and interaction to both construct and deconstruct realities. I use the term "realities" here because, as a "soft subjectivist" I am acknowledging the fact that, for all of us, there is more than one way to understand something; this is so because we are individually and collectively capable of creating various "realities" for ourselves and for one another. Multiple realities exist. As Rorty stated (as cited in Gergen, 1999),

[We must] appreciate the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important – an appreciation which becomes possible only when one's aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description (p. 62).

Gergen (1999) also revealed an important linkage when he suggested the notion of discourse as structure, and described the use of metaphor, as a tool of discourse, in establishing structure (which can be seen as the practical side of metaphor). We, as beings, are structured (i.e., constructed, arranged, and ordered) to one degree or another, and, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) indicated, not only is it possible to say that "man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or, more simply, than man produces himself" (p. 49). Social order is thus not seen as innate to humans, or even as part-and-parcel with society, but instead as fully a product of human interaction. Social order is a result of us interacting with one another, and together defining both individual personhood and collective realities as we progress through time. Because words gain the status of truths (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) as the years pass

within any given community (they are internalized), words create the very nature of that community, and thus they create what is real for the individuals that are a part of that community. It follows, as I suggested previously, that if we can use words to create, we can also use them to enhance, mitigate and destroy anything we can refer to as a “construct”, be it a leader or something else. Whether you choose to call it truth, whether you choose to call it reality, or whether you choose to call it by another name, language gives us the power to create and to destroy it, virtually at will.

Describing Morgan’s (1997) perspective, Gergen (1999) highlighted the power of metaphor to contribute not only to reality construction but to enhancing the over-all conceptual understandings held by each individual and to the generation of effective practices (talked about, in this case, in a managerial and organizational context). In his research, Morgan made it obvious that most of the significant ways in which we are able to understand organizations, and therefore to understand how to live within them, have a metaphorical base. As Gergen says “they are lived fictions in a world where there is no living beyond fiction” (1999, p. 176). Again, it is implied here that there is more than one way to see or understand something, that there is more than one reality, and, in the case of Morgan (1997), if any manager in any organization truly wants to be successful (however that is defined for them), they must be not only capable, but skilled at, seeing things through multiple lenses. Managers (or anyone in a leadership position) must be able to use the various lenses available to them to view reality alternatively and be competent in moving forward on the insights that the use of such viewpoints generates.

Morgan (1997) also directly addresses the power of using metaphor as a lens to aid understanding and perception formation when he indicates that true understanding lies in our ability to see that many different things, theories or perspectives for example, are really part of a single whole. In other words, multiple perspectives or theories must be considered in order to insure true and full comprehension, true understanding, true perception. Multiple perspectives underlie any singular perception, eliminating its singularity. Leaving additional perspectives out, we will never have a complete picture. Morgan (1997) indicated,

This is exactly what an understanding of the role of metaphor helps us to do. When we recognize that competing theories are competing metaphors, we can approach them in a new way. We can learn to see and tap their strengths and be aware of their inevitable weaknesses. We can set the grounds for a much more reflective approach to management practice, where people rather than theories are in the driving seat (p. 376).

Thus, metaphor is running parallel with the tenets of both post-modernism and social constructionism in its embrace of diversity and its disdain for singularity.

Miles and Huberman (1994) touch on the place metaphor has in creating theory. They stated that the people they study “use metaphors constantly as a way of making sense of their experience” (p. 250), and that this is similar to what researchers do when they examine their data; they use it to make sense of experience, to understand, explain, and clarify. In addition, they attribute several abilities to metaphor that are notable (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 250-252): first, they [metaphors] are data reducing, that is they allow us to take several “particulars” and make a single “generality” out of them; second, they are pattern making devices, helping to place patterns within the larger context in which they are embedded (making them more understandable); third, they are

decentering devices, meaning they require higher-level cognitive processing; lastly, they are ways of connecting findings to theory, “effectively uniting reasoning and imagination” (p. 252). Metaphors are a bridge, and are central not only to human understanding and reality creation, but to research endeavors as well.

Creating Understanding; Literature on Metaphor Use

“What, therefore, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors . . . “
(Nietzsche, 1964)

Psychological and sociological researchers, as well as those studying education and organizational development among other subjects, have used metaphor as a tool to enhance personal and collective understanding as well as to exert influence on constructs and lived reality. Just as Wittgenstein (1958) examined how language is a social activity, Morgan (1997) views metaphor as an “active, constitutive force that leads us to enact the world in a particular manner . . . metaphor makes meaning” (p. 427). As indicated earlier in this study, Morgan (1997) used metaphor to enhance understanding of organizations by describing various “lenses” (metaphorical tools) through which an organization, itself a social construct since it’s meaning is derived collectively, can be viewed. For example, he examined organizations through the metaphorical lens of “organizations as organisms”, metaphorically giving them life, and at the same time building a metaphor-based construct that enhanced our understanding of what an organization actually “is” (Morgan, 1997). And, as a tool of discourse, metaphor may present us with an opportunity to create, enhance, mitigate, or destroy social constructions. Hulsse (2003) asserts that metaphors construct reality by projecting “everyday life-worlds” onto abstract phenomena, and that not only do we construct a reality by what we say, but also by how

we say what we say. Using metaphor is a unique way to make understandable what needs to be understood in a given circumstance, it can serve as a descriptive tool in the communication equation; thus acting as a conduit for construct creation. By virtue of this power then, metaphor can be used to reinforce and even fully construct an individual's understanding (conceptualization) of him or herself through its intentional use in communication. If our reality is socially constructed, and if all of the constructs that we create can be influenced by language and by tools of language (discourse), then metaphor, as such a tool, can be said to actually create or re-create reality.

Several authors and researchers have gone to great lengths to highlight the constructive and creative power inherent in the use of metaphor. For example, Sontag researched both illness as metaphor and AIDS and its metaphors (1989), and came to the conclusion that the language surrounding illness and disease, specifically cancer and AIDS, greatly contributes to fear and misconceptions, and, in essence, ends up creating reality for their respective "patients" (as will be shown, this term and others like it carry labels and assumptions, which in turn create reality), as well as for the rest of society. Sontag (1989) stated that "etymologically, patient means sufferer" (p. 124), showing immediately how language, even in the form of a simple singular term, sets up a reality; the word carries various assumptions and connotations right along with it, and these directly impact the individual as well as those people around them. The word has very "real world" implications; if you are a patient, then you are suffering. As will be demonstrated, metaphor can actually create an entire larger story around a much smaller concept; prompting mental images and dialogue, and linking one part of life to another.

This innate power can act to fully shape our perceptions and thus our reality. In her AIDS work, Sontag (1989) is striving to illuminate the extreme power that metaphor and language have on our understanding, and, in this case, is using research to show how understanding provided through metaphor embedded in our everyday language actually works against the best interests of the individual by casting them in a negative light and ultimately creating their victimization. Sontag (1989) stated,

Cancer is still common as a metaphor for what is feared or deplored, even if the illness is less dreaded than before. If AIDS can eventually be drafted for comparable use, it will be because AIDS is not only invasive (a trait it shares with cancer) or even because it is infectious, but because of the specific [metaphor based] imagery that surrounds viruses (p. 156).

Here we can see very clearly, again, how language can create reality, providing not only liberation for all of us, but also restriction; actors are positioned and the “real-world” is affected. Here we see evidence, once again, of how very “real-world” effects are birthed from solely theoretical or philosophical concepts. Philosophical concepts are, in this case, well grounded.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provided a highly detailed account of how we, as both a society and as individuals, use the constructive power of metaphor to shape our lives. In essence, they asserted that what we “do every day is very much a matter of metaphor” (p. 3) since our conceptual system plays a central role in defining our everyday reality. And, according to Lakoff and Johnson, since metaphor serves to greatly contribute to, structure and define that conceptual system, metaphor can be said to create reality. Now, this is not to say that the creation of our conceptual system and the things that contribute to it are wielded intentionally; much of how we understand and order the world goes on

“behind the scenes”, occurring automatically and effortlessly as we go about the business of our lives (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). So, in many instances our reality is collectively created for us without us even being aware that it is happening. This assertion is in agreement with that of the social constructionist. For example, Sjostrand, Sandberg, and Tyrstrup (2001), indicated that we are not primarily creating reality through language and interaction, but are mainly re-creating it since so much of what we create is not original to us (though we may alter or “interpret” it to some degree before passing it along, it has, ultimately, been inherited from others).

For the purposes of this study, metaphor is defined as understanding and experiencing one kind of thing, for example organizations, emotions, physical occurrences, etc., in terms of another kind of thing. Metaphor thus serves as a bridge that allows connection between understandings to occur, and perhaps novel views to emerge.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) described how we can talk about the concept of an “argument” in terms of that of a “war”, which is a metaphorical structure that is reflected in our everyday language in a substantial number of expressions. For example; “your claims are indefensible”, “I demolished his argument”, or “his criticisms were right on target”. Each of these is a result of the same “argument is war” metaphor. It is easy to see, even in just this one very basic example, how we all metaphorically-structure concepts and to imagine just what the effects of that structuring are. In examples such as these, we are bridging the gap that divides our understanding of argument with our understanding of war, and creating new understanding, new perceptions, and new realities for ourselves and for others. Singular understandings become limitless.

If you postulate structuring an argument as a journey versus a war, for example, a whole different story emerges, and it becomes obvious how many of our conventional ways of presenting the concept of “arguing” actually pre-suppose a metaphorical root that we are likely not ever conscious of. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) asserted that we might talk about arguments this way because we actually generally conceive of them this way, and that we act, individually and collectively, based upon the dictates of both individual and group conceptions, both conscious and unconscious. Our conceptions and understandings, constructed by discourse and through our interaction with others, actually serve to “position actors” (those people operating within a given context or environment), as touched upon previously. Even if you have never actually been involved in a physical altercation or fought in a war or had any similar experiences, you have been arguing in one form or another since the time that you could talk, and you still conceive of arguments, and conduct them, following the “argument is war” metaphor. Why? Lakoff and Johnson pointed out that it’s because “the metaphor is built into the conceptual system of the culture in which you live” (1980, p. 64). Thus the metaphors we act upon every day, the metaphors that position us for action, are generally not of our own choosing, but have been ascribed through history and inherited through culture. This inherited nature of metaphor is in agreement with the tenets of a social constructionist epistemology. This realization prompted other questions, however. What would the effect on our reality be if we actively utilized metaphors of our own choosing, instead of those that have been passed on to us? What empowerment lies in knowing that we have a choice?

An additional power held by metaphor is that it allows us to personify something abstract in, for example, very human terms (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The authors explain this by describing how we conceptualize, and thus how we understand, something abstract like inflation. We might say “inflation has attacked the foundation of our economy,” or “the dollar has been destroyed by inflation,” or that “inflation has given birth to a money-minded generation” (pp. 33-34). When we do such a thing, we have personified inflation. But the metaphor isn’t structured simply as “inflation is a person”; it is given the actual characteristics of a person, and characterized as in, for example “inflation is an adversary”. Not only is it personified in this instance, it is actually personified in a very particular way, which sets it up to direct action accordingly. The “inflation as adversary” metaphor actually structures reality by positioning us for action and providing us with specific perceptions about the construct (inflation), giving rise to and providing justification for, for example, political and economic actions taken by our federal government (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). With inflation constructed in this way, we can thus “set inflationary targets”, “call on the people to sacrifice in hard inflationary times”, and “declare war on inflation”. Inflation is personified as an adversary, and done so intentionally in such political examples, not only to allow mass understanding, but to position people to act and to provide rationales for their actions and/or the actions of others. Metaphor is used as a tool to alter our understandings, and can be used intentionally to do so. Viewing something as abstract as inflation in much more human terms not only makes it more comprehensible, but seen metaphorically, with metaphor as a tool of discourse and discourse able to “position actors” (Burr, 2003) as shown

previously, the ethereal becomes real since it affects us by directly affecting our lived reality (through our actions).

The purpose of this portion of the discourse review was to show explicitly how metaphor allows us to get a handle on a concept so that we can more fully understand it, and then detailed how we actually structure our reality (individually and collectively) around that very understanding. To illustrate the point further, look at the concept of love. Does love have an actual structure? Does it exist apart from the meaning we give to it? Without engaging in a deep philosophical discussion about the fact that some people may believe that love is energy (itself a metaphorical conceptualization), or that love is what “drives the soul” or is “the essence of God” (again, all comparisons metaphorical in nature), we are forced to answer that, no, removed from an individual and societal context, love has no meaning, no structure, no form. Love is ultimately socially constructed. It becomes plain to see that whatever meaning, structure, or form it has is given to it by us primarily through metaphorical conceptualization. This is very similar to the ideas about disability presented earlier in this paper (see Bishop, Foster & Jubala, 1993), and similar to what I am positing about leaders and leadership in this study. Without the societally defined label, disability is non-existent. Without a societal definition of what love is or what it should be, it is also non-existent. The same can be said for leaders and leadership.

Obviously, this research is concerned with how we understand things; concepts, experiences, objects, emotions, and similar “stuff”. This concern for how we understand leads to the need for an explanation of what it means for us to “define” something very

differently (taking a view that would, for example, define something very differently than may be the traditional or dominant way that society, our culture or some sub-group would define it). In the case of this study, I am looking to define reality from a strictly subjective standpoint, versus the highly objective stance taken by many in the scientific community, and similar or associated persons and groups who are locked into a more positivist framework.

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 118) discuss, “The standard view seeks to be ‘objective’, and it assumes that experiences and objects have inherent properties and that human beings understand them solely in terms of those properties.” Love, for example, as defined or described by an objectivist, would (actually) be composed of things such as desire, fondness and attraction. Some would say that understanding is referential; these are simply abstract descriptors used to describe another abstraction. Such attributes would be things seen as inherent (or essential) properties of the concept of love itself. They exist, thus love exists and can be understood in terms of them. Love possesses properties that are then able to be separated from it.

Against this view, and in accordance not only with a social constructionist epistemology, but that of post-modernism and metaphorical construction, we could claim that, essentially, love is comprehended only partially by those types of attributes, and that we obtain our true understanding of love by constructing the concept metaphorically, understanding “love as a puzzle”, “love as a journey” or “love as madness” instead. In such cases, we are using metaphor to bridge the gap of understanding that exists between concepts. These types of metaphorical expressions are seen as “defining concepts”

(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) which emerge from our interactions with others, and thus the concepts that are metaphorically defined are understood in terms of what are called “interactional properties”. In other words, each concept is at least partially defined by things like perception, motor activity, purpose, function, and the like. As a result, we find that our conceptualizations of things like objects, just like our conceptualizations of things such as events and activities, and of abstractions such as inflation and love, are characterized as forms called “multidimensional gestalts” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These are multiple conceptualizations that come together to form a more singular understanding, and whose very nature emerges completely naturally from our personal (our interactional and “real world”) experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They are umbrellas under which multiple concepts exist. Thus we establish that we cannot characterize our conceptualizations entirely in terms of inherent properties, but rather we must see them as developing structure and definition through interaction. They are multifaceted. They are understood, defined and constructed partially if not fully, in conjunction with other people, and specifically, via metaphor. This assertion is in agreement with the tenets of social constructionism, and goes further toward bonding it with metaphor.

Given all of the above, we can say we have fully established how conventional metaphor substantially creates our reality. Thinking of arguments in terms of war, love in terms of a journey, or personifying inflation to get a “handle” on an otherwise abstract concept and to aid us in relating it to the world is commonplace, and, as has been shown previously, occurs in many instances virtually automatically and unconsciously.

However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also address metaphor that lies outside of our everyday conventional conceptual system, indicating that “. . . metaphors that are imaginative and creative . . . are capable of giving us new understanding of our experience . . . they can give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know and believe” (p. 139). Thus, metaphors not only have creative power, but re-creative power as well, allowing us to re-define a construct, for example, and view and understand it in a novel way.

To illustrate this, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) again turn to the concept of love, this time structuring it in terms of a less conventional metaphor, “Love is a collaborative work of art” (p. 139). The authors stated that they found this metaphorical concept particularly powerful because it truly helps to make our experiences of love coherent and personally relatable, it makes sense of them. They go on to suggest that new or unconventional metaphors help us understand in the same way that conventional metaphors do; that is, they provide a coherent structure, highlighting some things, while hiding others, and acting as a bridge. This is because, like all metaphors, they give rise to “entailments” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 139-140). An entailment can be seen as a characteristic of the metaphorical conceptualization. For example, “love is work”, “love requires cooperation”, and “love creates reality” could all be said to be entailments of the “love is a collaborative work of art” metaphorical conceptualization of love. Each entailment may, itself, have further entailments; the ultimate result is that a larger and very coherent network of entailments develops which may, in general, either match or not match our own experiences of “love”. These entailments further cement metaphor’s

reality creating ability. When the network that's been created (via entailment) does fit with our various past experiences, those experiences form a coherent whole and emerge as "instances of metaphor" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 140). When this kind of fit is established, there is a full-blown cognitive connection at work, tying all of the entailments together to form a whole, and "that awakens and connects our memories of our past love experiences and serves as a possible guide for future ones" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 140). Lakoff and Johnson also elaborated upon what happens when this kind of connection occurs, explaining five "guiding points" regarding metaphor by using the "love is a collaborative work of art" metaphorical conceptualization. This explanation is important to this study because it addresses the ability of metaphor to provide new meaning, in other words to construct or reconstruct a concept, an experience, an object, etc, and grant new understanding. Their five guiding points regarding metaphor are as follows (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 141-143):

1. Metaphor highlights certain features [of something like a construct] while suppressing others. For example, looking at the concept of love as a collaborative work of art involves excluding looking at love in other ways, for example as "love is madness". This agrees with other researchers such as Morgan (1997), who indicated that "in highlighting certain interpretations it [metaphor] tends to force others into a background role" (p. 4). As will be shown in the next section, stories have a similar feature.
2. Metaphor does not merely entail other concepts, like "work" or "creating reality," it entails very specific aspects of these concepts. An example being

that viewing love through the metaphorical lens of “love is a collaborative work of art”, generates the entailment that love is work, but it is not merely simply any kind of work being referred to, it is the type of collaborative, joint, creative work that is entailed in the creation of a piece of art. Thus the concept is nuanced and very specific, and not at all general in nature. It is understood in a singular way.

3. Since metaphor highlights important areas regarding love for the individual and makes them understandable and relatable, it also masks other love experiences, leaving them fully out of the picture. Thus, love is given a new (albeit very narrow) meaning as a result. If we are able to relate to what is entailed by the metaphorical instance, then the metaphor can attain the status of truth for us. For quite a few people, “love is a collaborative work of art” is true, and because of this the metaphor can have a “feedback effect” in which we’re led to conduct ourselves in accordance with the truth that has been established through our personally relating to the metaphor. Again, as will be seen, stories have this same feature.
4. Metaphors are appropriate because they sanction actions, justify inferences, and help us set goals. Metaphor provides direction in multiple areas of life, be they related to our day-to-day tasking, or to our broader, longer-term and over-arching life schema.
5. The meaning that any metaphorical conceptualization will have for an individual will be partly determined by culture (which provides immediate

metaphorical structure to each of us at birth and varies widely), but it will be partly tied to our past experiences as well. However, flexibility and the ability to re-define remain strong as long as a person is cognizant of the constructions and conceptualizations set before them. Knowledge of how metaphor constructs reality equals power to alter that reality. Due to these cultural and historical aspects of metaphor, the same metaphorical instance that gives new meaning to my experiences may not give new meaning to another persons.

Thus, subjectivity is referenced here.

It is evident from this example referencing love that metaphor allows us to create a reality in addition to simply conceptualizing (or re-conceptualizing) any pre-existing reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, I am not insinuating, nor are the authors referenced here, that it is necessarily an easy thing to change our metaphorical conceptualizations, in essence redefining some aspect of our reality, yet alone to re-define our reality entirely. However, the power inherent in the knowledge that reality is socially constructed and is thus pliable provides each of us with an opportunity to make real changes in our lives, either piecemeal or all encompassing, particularly when we are given tools that can assist us in making the changes we want or need to make. Changes “in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 146). In addition, Morgan (1997) indicated that having the knowledge that reality is socially constructed while having the tool of understanding regarding how metaphor structures reality serves to both empower the individual and enhance our society. New metaphors, just like conventional metaphors,

have the power to define reality for each of us, and are a large component of how we understand and manage our daily lives; “In all aspects of life...we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 158). We construct our reality through language, of which metaphor is a significant part, and we create our perceptions and understandings of all things in the process.

Rationale for a Subjectivist Stance

Social scientists have shown that our descriptions of reality are not objective, but are, in fact, fully socially produced (Danzinger, 1997; Burr, 1995). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provide lengthy and detailed discussions on the topics of subjectivity and objectivity, drawing comparisons along the lines of how each of these perspectives perceives and defines what is considered to be “truth”. These discussions are important to this study due to the epistemology (social constructionism) and tool (metaphorical story-making) being used to investigate how leader and leadership perceptions can be altered.

Social constructionism, as a post modernist epistemology, holds that subjectivity is paramount to objectivity, and, in fact, is unavoidable (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1999), while both metaphor and story-making are, by their very nature, fully subjective concepts; they originate in the individual and are altered and perpetuated through interaction and language. Though Lakoff and Johnson (1980) end up calling for an alternative to both subjectivity and objectivity, what they term “experientialism”², this alternative has more in common with subjectivity than it does

² This will be elaborated on in a later section of this dissertation.

objectivity, and their explanations regarding the limitations of maintaining the generally dominant objective view of reality underlie much of this study.

Objectivity, seen as the globally socially dominant position, defines truth as being absolute and ultimate (Burr, 2003; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; O'Farrell, 1999), and thus it asks us to strive for the one singular truth or the one singular definition or understanding that we can use to construct our reality (be it our overall reality or a more narrow portion thereof). More importantly, truth for an objectivist involves concepts, objects and abstractions having inherent (essential) properties, as discussed previously. These properties are understandable to everyone (universal) and exist outside of any sort of contextual or interactional framework, and thus they exist apart from their "host" as well (see the discussion regarding metaphor and love in the previous section for more on the impossibility of this). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) indicated, "we do not believe that there is such a thing as objective truth, though there has been a long standing theme in Western culture that there is" (p. 159). Morgan (1997) rendered a critique of quantitative analysis (which relies on objectivity) that likens it to magic, and stated that:

Techniques of quantitative analysis seem to perform a similar role. They are used to forecast the future and analyze the consequences of different courses of action in a way that lends decision making a semblance of rationality and substance. The use of such techniques does not, of course, reduce risks. The uncertainties surrounding a situation still exist, hidden in the assumptions underlying the technical analysis (p. 146).

Statements such as these are in direct agreement with those seen within the epistemology of social constructionism itself, which calls for us to question assumptions and examine taken for granted knowledge (Burr, 2003), and which denies the existence of any one, singular truth, definition or approach to understanding (O'Farrell, 1999); this is also the

post-modernist's view (Lyotard, 1984). Thus, via a denunciation of objectivity, another direct linkage between social constructionism and metaphor is established.

Additionally, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) take issue with the choices that have been traditionally offered by society when it comes to choosing either an objective or subjective viewpoint. They compare the duality that we are each given by our society to choose from at birth to myopically living fully at just one of the extremes or the other. If we do not embrace objectivism (and thus also the related and underlying concepts and theory associated with it like positivism and essentialism), we are given the alternate and seemingly only other choice of subjectivism, which, though much closer to what Lakoff and Johnson themselves would espouse, is also seen as somewhat limiting in terms of our understanding and experience (mainly because it lies at the opposite extreme, espousing a virtually unlimited creativity). Each viewpoint is likened each to a myth, perpetuated by those at the extremes; each fighting for domination of our understanding, and thus our reality. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) outlined their reasoning for this belief, and went on to construct and then deconstruct the arguments for why each of the extremes is "true". They state, in brief, that objectivism and subjectivism really need each other in order to exist, each defining itself only in opposition to the other and casting the other as the enemy (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Embedded within this argument is that, in essence and theory, both of the extreme concepts miss the very significant point that we understand our world through our very real interactions with it. For example, objectivism misses the fact, as established in this study and others, that our understanding, and thus our truth, is necessarily relative to our individual and cultural conceptual system, and that

it cannot be framed in any type of absolute terms. It also forgets that human conceptual systems are proven to be metaphorical in nature (see the previous discussions on metaphor), and thus involve us actually understanding one thing in terms of another (and that, in fact, in many instances metaphorical conceptualization is the only way to understand something at all).

Subjectivism, on the other hand, misses the fact that our understanding, even in its most imaginative form, is given in terms of a conceptual system that is indeed grounded in our successful functioning in both our direct physical environment and our over-all culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), and thus our ability to create is not truly all encompassing, but limited to some small degree. However, some social constructionists may disagree with this, and we would then be entering a world closer to that of the deconstructionist, where “nothing exists outside text” (Derrida, 1976). Subjectivist positioning relies on a single basic assumption; that experience does not have a natural (grounded) structure, and thus, there can be “no natural constraints on meaning and truth” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 224). However, it has been argued and shown that our conceptual system and our actual lived experience are both very highly structured and related, particularly in terms of the development of metaphorical instances. For example, experiential gestalts are structured in addition to being structuring, and this structuring is not arbitrary, but emerges naturally through our experience and interactions, and is thus seen as being structurally grounded. Structuring emerges out of our direct “real-world” interactions with other people. In addition, within a contemplation of social constructionism, phenomenologists like Husserl, (as cited in Sjostrand, Sandberg, and

Tyrstrup, 2001) have postulated that, as “living subjects” we are always related to reality through our lived experience of that reality. Thus our actual physical lived experience grounds us.

Instead of making a choice that lies at either extreme, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) offer us a third choice; experientialism. This view successfully addresses the weaknesses inherent in both objectivism and subjectivism, though it comes theoretically closer to subjectivism than it does objectivism. Experientialism provides a middle ground.

An exclusionary duality has existed for so long in Western culture that in most cases this either/or polarization goes fully unquestioned except by those who lie at the extremes and race to degrade the view that lies opposite their own (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Experientialism offers another approach. Whereas objectivism espouses absolute truth, experientialism asserts that truth is always relative to understanding, and since understanding is based on a non-universal conceptual system composed of both culturally and self created realities, there can be more than one truth regarding any concept, object, theory or construct at any one time. Under experientialism, objectivity and inherent characteristics or properties are not necessary to find truth; essentialism is dead. It should be noted, however, that objectivism takes on a new meaning under the experientialist approach. Here “objectivity . . . involves [simply] rising above individual bias, whether in matters of knowledge or value. But where objectivity is reasonable, it does not require an absolute, universally valid point of view” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 227). What Lakoff and Johnson are stating here is that objectivity is completely relative to a

conceptual system and a set of culturally specific values; objectivism is only about rising above the bias that results from that relativity.

What is important to subjectivism is the awareness that any meaning is always relative to a person's understanding; subjective meaning is always meaning to a particular individual or group. Thus, what is meaningful for me is determined by what is important to me, which will not depend on any knowledge gained rationally alone, but will also be based upon my past experiences, my feelings, and my intuitive learning. "Meaning is not cut and dried; it is a matter of imagination and a matter of constructing coherence" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 227). Objectivism misses what is important, understood and meaningful to the individual, while subjectivism embraces it fully and without exception. Experientialism's assertions parallel those of subjectivism to a degree. However, the extreme of subjectivism carries the notion that all meaning is constructed (with absolutely no exceptions) and that the creative ability this bestows is completely unrestrained. Experientialism rejects this notion, too, since it sees subjectivism as missing the fact that understanding is gained via a conceptual system that is fully grounded in our successful functioning in our physical and cultural environments (as outlined earlier in this chapter). Experientialism is a hybrid of objectivism and subjectivism; rejecting notions proven false for each myth, while "correcting" their flaws under the tenet that truth does not lie at the extremes, but in the successful synthesis of both distant points of the stratum.

Under the experientialist perspective, truth flows directly from understanding, which flows from our functioning in the world and our interactions. It is via this understanding that this perspective meets the objectivist's requirement that there be a

truth, and it is via the coherent structuring of our experience that this perspective touches upon the subjectivist's requirement for personal meaning and significance (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Hybridization occurs. The experientialist perspective synthesizes much of what has been outlined in discussing metaphor. This perspective, like those of objectivism and subjectivism, stresses understanding as the basis for the creation of reality, but goes one step further in that it satisfies the requirements of both points of view, and melds them into a new option.

For the purposes of this study, I am defining subjectivity "softly", meaning that I am acknowledging that reality (what we perceive as real) is the result of collaborative social processes and discourse, but also acknowledging that, since social process and discourse are anchored in real world every-day interactions with others, they are grounded. Due to this grounding, there are limits to our creative potential. This view is very similar to Lakoff and Johnson's description of experientialism in that it does not reside at either extreme, but in the middle ground that exists between the theoretical and the real.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) assert that developing an understanding of ourselves is no different than developing understanding regarding anything else; self-understanding develops from our constant interactions with other people and our cultural and physical environments. Mutual understanding involves a search for commonality of experience in relation to others, and in understanding ourselves we are searching for ways to unify our own varied experiences in order to attain coherence in our lives. And, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stated,

Just as we seek out metaphors to highlight and make coherent what we have in common with someone else, so we seek out our own personal metaphors to highlight and make coherent our own pasts, our present activities, and our dreams, hopes and goals as well (pp. 232-233).

The conclusion that is ultimately reached in this discussion is that a significant part of our self-understanding lies in the search for personal metaphors that can assist us in making sense of our lives, and that we also use similar process to make sense of the world around us. To facilitate this search, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) highlight four steps that are involved in creating self-understanding. These are relevant to this study because they are in accord with social constructionism's call for questioning and flexibility, and are theory-based suggestions grounded in real-world exercise that can serve to redefine our perceptions. They are:

1. Coming to a realization regarding the metaphors that affect our lives, and understanding how and where they structure reality, and where they are not currently structuring it.
2. Creating alternative experiences for ourselves that can form the basis of alternative metaphors (those kinds of metaphors described previously as unconventional).
3. Developing a tolerance for flexibility of experience.
4. Engaging in an unending process of seeing our lives and all that they encompass through new and alternative metaphors.

This study seeks to “activate” and forward these steps for leadership. Through our acknowledgement of the role that metaphors play in creating our reality, we gain personal power, and an ability to create and re-create our understandings and perceptions (Lakoff

& Johnson, 1980) about virtually all aspects of our world. Developing new metaphors about leaders and leadership can alter our perceptions about what these constructions are, and going further by placing metaphorical understanding in the form of a story (Morgan, 1997) can assist us in bringing the new perceptions that we have gained to life even more effectively.

Communicating Commonality; Literature on Story-making

“Pure unstoried action, pure unstoried existence in the present, is impossible.”
(Randall, 1995)

In a way very similar to that of metaphor, stories are capable of adding to our understanding and to the formation of our perceptions, and thus to our reality. Additionally, stories help make the abstract understandable, and assist us in seeing ourselves in others; simply put, stories showcase how much we have in common with one another. Denning (in Patton, 2002) indicated that, “storytelling has the power to transform individuals and organizations” (p. 195).

Whether it is our understanding of a concept, a thing, or life-situation, stories can offer relatability to what might otherwise be incomprehensible or difficult for us to relate to (such attributions are also made to metaphor). Stories highlight our interconnectedness; they allow us to see our lives in terms of the lives of others, showcasing our sameness while also pointing out our differences. They are similar to metaphor in these ways as well. Metaphors allow us to understand one thing in terms of another, just as stories allow us to see ourselves and our own lives in the situations, viewpoints and lives of others. Metaphors, by their very nature, highlight certain aspects of a thing, while leaving others in the shadows (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Stories are similar in that they bring their

specific topic into our consciousness and into the present moment in their telling, but exclude those details that are either unnecessary or that do not serve the purposes at hand. In these and many other ways, story-telling and metaphors go hand-in-hand. I would actually assert that metaphors create stories by default, and that a story can actually be considered to be metaphorical if the listeners can identify with it and view their own lives through it (Berman & Brown, 2000). Take the “argument is war” metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) that was discussed in the previous section on metaphor. Doesn’t seeing arguing in terms of war not automatically create images in the mind? Does it not bring multiple different associations into our consciousness, tapping into both our past experience as well as our future thinking on the subject? And, if a story is told about an argument that a person can relate to on an individual level, it becomes automatically metaphorical since one thing (one person’s experience of an argument) is being seen in terms of another thing (someone else’s experience of an argument). To consider this further, look again at the specific personification of “inflation as an adversary” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Thinking of inflation in this manner virtually automatically lends itself to the creation of a story, hence the use of the metaphor in politics. A story can be built around it that justifies, provides a rationale, and “rallies the troops” all at once.

In the afterward of their book *Learning Journeys*, Goldsmith, Kaye and Shelton (2000) indicated that “in such a simple fashion, stories can convey much that other forms of communication cannot” (p. 206) and that stories are capable of “. . . making complex ideas understandable and even actionable.” (p. 206). Similar qualities are ascribed to both metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and social constructionism (Burr, 1995); each of

which can be said to “position actors”. Stories can make things not just understandable, but also palatable because they provide not only a context in which to understand, but impart believability that mere facts may not (Simmons, 2001) and they allow us to relate ourselves and our experiences to those of others around us. In essence, when we envision our own experiences as similar to the experience(s) of others, we find an understanding of ourselves that may have been long obscured.

In describing what is involved in designing “significant learning experiences” for students, Fink (2003) includes story-making and story-sharing in the portion of his learning taxonomy that deals with caring. That is, he discovered that courses in which the instructors were found to have created significant learning experiences for their students involved the teachers finding ways to increase the degree to which students cared about what they were learning; the use of stories was found to increase levels of caring because it enabled the students to connect with their feelings about the topic being studied, enhancing their understanding of the subject substantially (Fink, 2003). Cognitive scientists have discovered, in fact, that stories are “more memorable and better support learning and understanding than non-story narratives” (Shaw, Brown and Bromiley, in Patton, 2002), clearly demonstrating how stories and narrative shape our perceptions and our knowledge.

Clearly, stories contribute to understanding, which, in turn, contributes to the construction of reality as indicated in previous discussions on social constructionism and metaphor; understanding is directly linked to construct creation. Numerous studies have shown how story-telling, just like metaphor, allows us to make sense of things or events

and allows us to be eased into change by “setting the stage” and providing a context and a rationale for action (Simmons, 2001). The creation and sharing of stories allows us to construct our reality, and particularly when used intentionally, provides us with another tool that we can use to justify and influence “real-world” practice. Again, stories share this power with metaphor. As an example, when a metaphorical story arises and is seen as influencing the creation of policy and causing the modification of procedure, as is the case in the inflation example described earlier, we see in evidence a “real world” effect that is the outcome of the use of the tool. This connection provides additional strength to the linkage between social constructionism, metaphor and story-making.

Simmons (2001) outlined multiple reasons why stories are growing increasingly important as our world becomes more complex and information-rich. Among the assets that stories and story-telling possess, and one that is important to this study, is that “story doesn’t grab power, story creates power” (p. 29). Here she indicated that, through the power of story, anyone can be a leader; “you do not need a position of formal leadership when you know the power of story” (p. 29). By this Simmons means that story can both influence our perceptions and creep into our unconscious, in essence “positioning actors” (Burr, 2003) as described earlier in this section and dissertation, and constructing our reality. Simmons (2001) also commented on the power of stories to make things that may otherwise not be readily understandable available to us, and indicated that story can assist us in “reframing” events, situations, and perceptions. Stories are especially important to leaders and leadership in an increasingly interconnected world because, as Simmons (2001) indicated,

Providing a story that adds a new viewpoint to your listeners internal perspective helps them think about their choices in a novel context. In the case where choices are unconscious a story can provide a new viewpoint that is more conscious . . . [and] often self-awareness is enough to change behavior (p. 47).

Clearly then, stories are powerful tools for shaping not only our perceptions, but our reality itself through the influence that they exert on those perceptions. Like metaphor, story-making and telling can serve as tools of change, and the knowledge that, for example, leaders and leadership are pliable constructs which can be influenced not only through a recognition of this quality, but by knowledge of tools that can assist us in this capacity, is extremely empowering in and of itself. Having the knowledge is power (a position), using it is powerful (an action).

Some researchers have taken story-telling out of the realm of psychology, sociology, education and anthropology³ and moved their explorations directly into organizations and the field of organizational development. For example, Boje (1991) wrote about the influence of story-telling in organizations, finding support for the position that organizations were indeed “storytelling systems” (seeing “organization as a storytelling system” is metaphorical in itself) and that stories were “. . . a key part of [an organization] member’s sense making, and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory” (p. 106). Stories were found to reconstruct an organization member’s reality, in particular when the stories were shared, formally or informally, within the organization. This reconstructive power is similar to that of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) as outlined in previous discussions. Boje (1991) described how most stories take place amidst conversation, as opposed to in

³ These are the areas in which story-telling has traditionally been used and researched.

written or other formats, and that the process of storytelling is dynamic, involving an exchange between the story teller or tellers and the listener or listeners. Over time, due to the nature of this type of information sharing, stories can be said to be constructed primarily in conjunction with others; they are based on our interactions with other people and emerge as “edited” over the course of time. Just like metaphorical instances or conceptualizations, we see that stories are directly related to context, and in fact are fully embedded within it, and that “their meaning unfolds through the storytelling performance event” (Boje, 1991).

Numerous other researchers have not only referenced the power of storytelling, but have used it as the tool that it quite obviously is. For example, Gardner (1995) states “leaders achieve their effectiveness chiefly through the stories they relate” (p. 9). He went on to tell the stories of numerous notable leaders of recent times, like Martin Luther King, Jr., Margaret Thatcher, Eleanor Roosevelt and Mahatma Gandhi. Gardner used each story to “create a leadership reality” for individuals in the study, allowing readers to form a better understanding of what leaders and leadership can be. A bridge was built that linked one understanding to another. Again, we see that, just like metaphor, stories create a reality, form perceptions, and serve to enhance individual and group understanding.

Hagadorn and Rae (2004) show how dramatically the sharing of a personal story can help individuals reconstruct themselves in new and different ways. They shared the story of a Cambodian immigrant named Arn-Chorn Pond, and described how he was able to “refigure the narrative” of his life (p. 57), witnessing first hand the ability of storytelling to change self-perceptions. It should also be noted here, however that this

process was dynamic, and involved Arn sharing his story with others, who it may be said, reflected back a new reality to him and allowed him to see himself in new ways.

Perceptions were altered, a bridge of understanding was created, and Arn was reconstructed. He left behind a painful past and remade himself; Arn was now fully capable of facing life in what was a new land for him, America. Hagadorn and Rae (2004) stated,

Human narrative is experienced through the lens of a three-fold present made up of past-present, future-present, and present-present. Past and future are never experienced as fact but through an interpretation of them from where one is situated in the present . . . As a result, humans have the capacity to assign new meanings to the past and imagine multiple possibilities for the future. This opens the door to regard life as a work of fiction, not in the pejorative sense of falsehood but in the ennobling sense that one can become the creative author of life and, by extension, organizations and society” (p. 55).

Bruner (1990), a cultural psychologist, suggested that narrative and story-making are a means for creating the exceptional as real and relatable, and for forming a bridge to the ordinary. He goes on to argue that we actually make meaning of life events through the act of story-telling, in essence creating understanding and shaping both meta (“big picture”) and micro (“localized”) reality for ourselves and one another along the way.

We see in story-making numerous similarities to the creative power of metaphor, which is also highly contextually based and allows us to assign and reassign meanings to many areas of our lives. Additionally, stories have the clear ability to convey complex ideas and experiences easily, and are seen as providing a very powerful method for doing so because they possess the capacity to resonate with others (Hagadorn and Rae, 2004). Metaphors do not create themselves, stories do not tell themselves, and leadership does not happen by itself. All of these things occur in relationship; the result of our

interactions with those around us, in particular through conversation and social exchange. Clearly, social constructionism, metaphor, and stories are dynamically linked together.

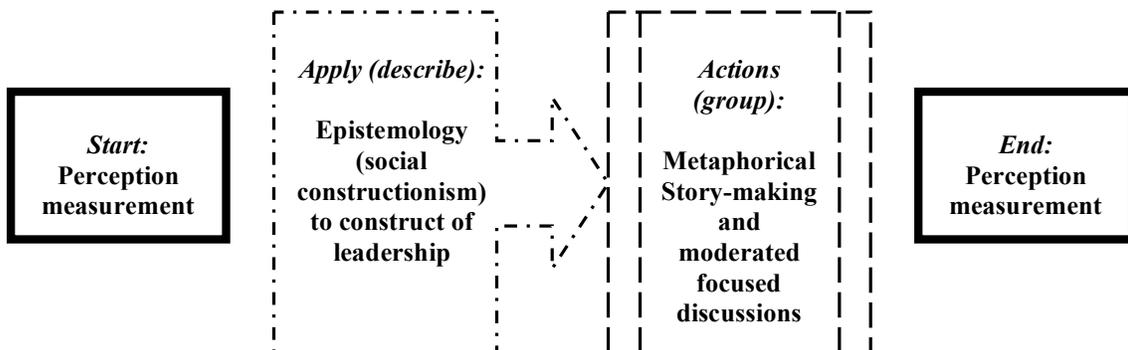
Berman and Brown (2000), discuss how story-telling is not only a way of conveying information or sharing knowledge, but that it can actually serve as a “vehicle to deliver messages to the subconscious where the ‘a-ha’ of metaphor takes place” (p. 3). Like other researchers, they state that metaphor not only allows us to learn, but that, in many cases, it is the only way to understand something at all. This is true particularly with abstract and subjective concepts like love, which is just one of many things for which this could be said to be so (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Berman and Brown (2000) are going one step further here, however, and putting forth the notion that metaphor actually allows us to learn in a subtle way, easing new conceptualizations and understandings directly into our subconscious, where they can become lived reality over time (they become internalized). And, as psychology has shown, when the subconscious is activated, the new idea, concept or perception can be instilled with little or no resistance (Berman & Brown, 2000). As counselors, these authors have used both the power of metaphor and the power of storytelling to assist their clients in reconstructing their lives. They stated that “metaphor is powerful because it parallels life; the story is dynamic because it captivates. When a metaphor is embedded in a story, the captivation of the listener activates the subconscious, and the metaphor is absorbed” (Berman & Brown, 2000, p. 4). Thus, when a story is developed around a metaphorical conceptualization, the combination is an extremely powerful tool of discourse that can, when used intentionally or unintentionally, create or re-create reality for any one of us.

As malleable social constructions, individual perceptions of leaders and leadership may be altered through the use of metaphorical story-making; this is a tool capable of dramatically changing reality for anyone willing to use it.

Theoretical Model

Sellitz, Wrightsman, and Cook (as cited in Stillman, 2005, p. 404) define a theory as a “set of concepts plus the interrelationships that are assumed to exist among those concepts”. That is, the outcomes that logically flow from the relationships posed within the theory should be hypotheses that are testable by the researcher (Stillman, 2005). This definition of theory generated the following theoretical model (Figure 1), which serves as the basis of this study, and which influenced the selection of the methodology this is described in Chapter 3. The model will be developed as this dissertation progresses, developing into the research methodology model described in Chapter 3.

Figure 1 – Theoretical Model



Importance of the Theoretical Linkage

If we, as individuals, are born of relationship, as proposed in [this dissertation], what follows? Is this simply a fancy metaphor – possibly inventive and even inspirational – but ultimately inconsequential outside academic walls? This is always the danger of intellectual work – trusting that what is printed actually makes a difference in the world.

However, in the present case there is good reason to believe in an active relationship between words on the page and in the street. For the constructionist words are themselves a form of social practice and it is imperative that these practices not remain closeted in the house of privilege.

(Gergen, 1999, p. 142)

Constructionist research is important primarily because of the broad range of implications that are introduced (for example for instruction, organization development, leadership education, and qualitative research methodology, among other things) when it is used. When an extensive examination of the history of this study's theoretical model is undertaken, and when we reflect upon its potential uses, a myriad of possibilities arise for theorists and practitioners⁴.

First, though perhaps not most importantly, this model heeds the call of other researchers (Hulsse 2003; Lambert, 1995; O'Farrell, 1999; among many others) to devote more time and energy to studies of leadership that use alternative social and educational research methodologies, in particular calling for the investigation into ways that we can evolve the methods used, formally or informally, to prepare individuals for various types of leadership roles. Examining leadership perceptions as socially constructed realities which are subject to influence and available for change can assist educators and researchers in heeding this call.

⁴ Though some prefer to see theory as more important than practice, or vice versa, this study holds that they are equally important and are in a mutual relationship of influence with one another.

Calls for the evolution of our leadership paradigms were evidenced in the assertions of educational researchers like Lambert et al. (1995) when, for example, they stated “We need educational leaders who are prepared differently than those who now inhabit the schools. We need teachers who perceive themselves first and foremost as educational leaders” (p. 194). I would venture to extend this assertion even farther however, claiming that the benefits of “differently prepared” leaders extend far beyond the scope of just our system of education; leaders in every sector, both public and private, can benefit from leadership preparation that stresses self-knowledge, self-exploration, and empowerment first and foremost, and encourages an understanding of the power that is held within the realization that a leader is a malleable social construction, and thus, that “leader” is a hat that we all can wear when desired or required. Viewing leaders and leadership as social constructions, and the use of both metaphor and story-making, in conjunction or alone, can help make the true nature of “leader” (or virtually any construct) evident and enhance individual self-understanding to the point of total reconstruction of the construct for the person using the tool(s).

Second, I think it is quite safe to say that most people assume the role of leader in some capacity over the course of their lives, and for most of us this happens quite frequently at various different personal and professional levels. Thus, there are implications for all segments of society and all individuals to be found here. As our world grows ever more complex, as societies merge and become increasingly inter-connected, as cultures are shaped and re-shaped by technology, education, and the environment, leadership needs to assume the use of a new paradigm, one that embraces rapid change,

high levels of interaction, collaboration, diversity and tenets of pluralism. Hierarchical, individualistic, and/or trait-based models are no longer as useful as they once were.

Being seen as a social construct is of benefit to the field of leadership because in our world today, a world fully socially constructed by each of us according to our needs, tastes, socially defined understandings of “normalcy”, and immediate context, a leader is required to be adaptable and flexible. We should be able to tailor what being a leader “is” to the varying audiences that are encountered, and social constructionism allows for this tailoring. Constructionism allows for situation by situation, person by person re-invention of the leader-self. As Foucault (1972) had said “the judges of normalcy are everywhere”; seeing leader and leadership perceptions as malleable constructs may enable us, individually and collectively, to satisfy those “judges” who emerge seeking leaders who are highly adaptable and are of open heart and mind.

The ripple-effect that could occur, and may, in fact, be occurring now, extends well beyond the time and space limitations of a single qualitative study, but should be somewhat self-evident, reaching as it does far beyond the borders of the narrow examination of education or leadership and into each and every area in which a social construct can be said to exist. To a social constructionist philosopher and historian like Foucault (1972), that would include every area and cover everything, even the construction we create to represent our individual selves each and every day.

Third, and perhaps most importantly to any social constructionist, this research can be seen as advancing a general understanding of the social constructionist epistemology itself. As a tool which aids understanding, social constructionism is being

seen more frequently in journal articles, books, and dissertations, and researchers like Gueldenzoph (2004) are even applying constructionist theory to things like distance learning and on-line study; mixing philosophy, linguistics, sociology, psychology and education with technology, and using basic constructionist and constructivist concepts to help their students learn. Life is becoming more interdisciplinary than ever, and theory and practice need to be just as interdisciplinary if they are to be effective in these environments.

If nothing else comes of an individual's introduction to constructionism and to discovering the power of metaphor and story, anyone can be said to benefit from being shown a different way of looking at life and how we make sense of the world. It is hoped, however, that more researchers can heed the calls of those like Lambert et al. (1995) who advocate integrations of practice, theory, and epistemology, those who offer a multi-disciplinary and pluralistic approach to teaching leadership, and those like the educators at Seattle's Berkana Institute who are utilizing a community-collaborative model of leader-training. This study is another step toward furthering these goals.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED DISCOURSES

Introduction

This study investigated individual leadership perceptions and described a tool of influence that can be used when those perceptions were seen as socially constructed. From a perspective that viewed the role of “leader” and the broader conceptualization of “leadership” as products of social interaction, this study examined if and how the tool of metaphorical story-making (using the metaphor “leader as social construction” in a focus group environment) influenced individual understanding of the constructs along a “flexible versus inflexible” continuum, as described in Chapter 1.

The review of the related discourses¹ (Piantanida & Garman, 1999) that follows starts out by broadly examining the epistemology of social constructionism, which is the foundation that this study is based upon. The review begins by placing constructionism in a historical context, and then describes in more detail how it contributes to the creation of both our individual and collective realities. It focuses specifically on the social construction of leaders and leadership, relating them to “real world” action (i.e., it shows how our socially constructed reality affects our actions and how we operate within a

¹ Piantanida and Garman (1999) prefer the term “Review of Relevant Discourses” to “Review of Literature” for several reasons. I have adapted their concept for use here. Primarily, they wish to escape the notion of “*the* review of *the* literature”, which implies complete comprehensiveness, and is somewhat exclusionary in that it ignores the idea that study-relevant discourses can be found outside the body of formal theoretical literature. “Review of Relevant Discourses” is more inclusive, and therefore agrees with the post modern and social constructionist framework upon which this study is based, since both value inclusion and see all perspectives as equally valid.

given context or environment). Here, the epistemology is grounded in real world practice.

The review then progresses through the constructionism-metaphor-story making linkage by examining the research on metaphor and story-making individually, displaying the complementary nature of the concepts, and showing how they can be used jointly to alter individual perceptions of leaders and leadership. The creation of this linkage allows leaders and leadership to be seen as pliable social constructions which are given life through interaction and language, and are therefore available to everyone. This understanding runs counter to more traditional leadership metaphor(s) that focus on narrower, primarily individualistic, essential or inherent traits and characteristics. The section concludes by elaborating on the linkage as a whole, and discusses its importance as established through the discourse review that has been conducted in this chapter.

Reality is Subjective; Literature on Social Constructionism

“[We must] appreciate the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important – an appreciation which becomes possible only when one’s aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description.”

(Rorty, as cited in Gergen, 1999, p. 62)

Numerous researchers in recent decades have used a social constructionist epistemology as a base from which to examine concepts, practices, perceptions, constructs and behaviors, among other things. For example, Meindl appearing in Dansereau and Yammarino (1998) used social constructionism to research leadership, looking at leadership as being “follower-centric”, that is, something that is socially constructed between followers and leaders. Leadership in this case is primarily an

outcome of group social processes, and does not exist otherwise. As a result of his investigations using a social constructionist base, Meindl (1998) indicates, “manipulations of contexts and constructions, rather than of leader behaviors, would, in a sense, constitute the practice of leadership” (p. 289). He concluded that it seems not only to be an available epistemological framework with which to study leadership, but one that is in fact necessary and desirable for researchers to use. He indicated that we should strive to “return leadership study to a focus on what actors and observers construct as a normal part of their social experiences” (p. 297).

Applying a social constructionist framework to leadership in management, Sjostrand, Sandberg, and Tyrstrup (2001) studied how managers are one of several groups that construct organizational leadership for employees. They viewed managerial leadership as being primarily interactional, aiming to explain, in particular, how small-talk serves to structure organizational reality and influence leadership perceptions among employees in several Scandinavian and German companies. Their findings have shown that managerial leadership has moved beyond the notion of existing primarily in the work context (that is, directly within organizations themselves), and now resides more within personal interactions, which, in many cases, actually occur outside of the formal organizational setting. These more formal settings have been the dominant areas examined in previous constructionist-based leadership research projects, if and when interaction and social influences were examined at all.

While the philosophical basis out of which social constructionism evolved conceptually dates back several hundred years, the concept in use here refers to a school

of thought and an epistemological position that was greatly expanded upon in the 1950's and 1960's by researchers such as Wittgenstein (1958) and Schutz (1967). It was introduced into the field of sociology (note that social constructionism emerged into different fields at different times, and has been represented by different researchers accordingly) by Berger and Luckmann (1966) with the publication of their book *The Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. In this book, the authors provide an in-depth introduction to the concept of social construction, discuss its implications, and provide a historically grounded theoretical base from which to examine how reality is created for each one of us. It was not until constructionist theory was introduced into science, however, that it became a truly “influential methodological paradigm” (Patton, 2002, p. 99). This influence began to be felt with the 1970 publication of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Patton (2002) indicated,

Before Kuhn, most people thought that science progressed through heroic individual discoveries that contributed to an accumulating body of knowledge that got closer and closer to the way the world really worked. In contrast, Kuhn argued [that] . . . ideas that seemed to derive from brilliant individual scientific minds were actually shaped by and dependent on paradigms of knowledge that were socially constructed and enforced through group consensus (p. 99).

Here, Kuhn is explicitly removing (for the first time) scientific advancement from the individual and relocating it directly into the collective. This relocation was seen as a “critical case” (Patton, 2002) for social constructionism, since, if scientific knowledge is socially created and validated in a community, as opposed to consisting of individually generated and empirically-based discovery that is anchored in the natural world, then “surely all knowledge is socially constructed” (Patton, 2002, p. 99).

Social constructionism's main roots can be traced back to three developments in nineteenth century German thought: the Marxian, the Nietzschean, and the Historicist, with Historicist thought seen as being expressed in the works of Wilhelm Dilthey, who discussed the "relativity of all perspectives on human events" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 7). The sociology of knowledge, which is concerned with everything that passes as "knowledge" in any given group or society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), is defined as the study of how we come to acquire information and understanding, and is the area within the field of sociology where social constructionism resides. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated:

The theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is "real" for members of a society. Since this is so, the sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people "know" as "reality" in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives. In other words, commonsense "knowledge" rather than "ideas" must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. It is precisely this "knowledge" that constitutes the fabric meanings without which no society could exist (p. 15).

According to these authors then, the "sociology of knowledge must concern itself with the social construction of reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 15). To summarize, Berger and Luckmann put forth the notion that knowledge is socially created and distributed, and how that distribution occurs lends itself to study, and, in fact, to becoming a discipline unto itself; a discipline fixed, in this particular case, within the field of sociology. Thus, the sociology of knowledge is the sociological sub-discipline that examines how knowledge is socially distributed. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) succinctly indicated; "how is it possible that human activity . . . should produce a world of things . . ." (p. 18), thus implying that our reality is created (it is "produced"), and is

the result of our interactions with one another and with our environment. Reality is thus both interactional and contextual. Berger and Luckmann have argued that the everyday life we know is not something that has meaning, or even existence, outside of social contexts. It is, rather, something that is meaningful to us primarily by way of others. This is in agreement with Schutz (1967) who indicated that “Only a very small part of my knowledge of the world originates within my personal experience . . . the typifying medium par excellence by which socially derived knowledge is transmitted is the vocabulary and syntax of everyday language” (p. 14). Thus, not only is knowledge socially derived (constructed), that knowledge is also shared primarily via our interactions and communications with other people.

The most significant vehicle used in our interactions with one another every day is language in all its forms; be it through talking, reading and writing, or through body-language, communication is paramount to understanding since knowledge is socially distributed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schutz, 1967). In fact, numerous researchers over the years have examined how socially created definitions of management (and leadership) stipulated that communication is a highly significant factor in the formation of those definitions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984; Mead, 1934; Weber, 1947). For Berger and Luckmann, “everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen” (1966, p. 37). An understanding of the influence of language, and its multiple dynamic effects, is therefore crucial to an understanding of the reality of our everyday lives. Here is found the notion that creative capacity is embedded directly in language (Berger & Luckmann, 1966); “Put simply,

through language, an entire world can be actualized at any moment” (p. 39) and “language constructs immense edifices of symbolic representations that appear to tower over the reality of everyday life like gigantic presences from another world” (p. 40). Thus, it is through our interactions with others, through our conversations and communications themselves, that “constructs” of various kinds, be they concrete like mountains, or abstractions like disability or leadership, develop and have meaning for each of us.

Implicit in Berger and Luckmann’s assertion regarding the power of construction is that this power is available to everyone, and is not simply something that “happens”. Thus, construct creation is not at all passive, but is a tool that can be called upon to alter reality at any time and by anyone. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), “While it is possible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man constructs himself” (p. 49). All this being said, also implicit is the fact that, even when guided by the epistemology just established, individuals do not operate in a vacuum. We construct our own nature via our interactions with others and through our very real physical operations within our direct environment(s); reality is something that we create together, and is a fully social enterprise (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 51).

In sum, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966) and other researcher-theorists (see Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999; Schutz, 1967) it is by working together that we create reality for ourselves and for one another, and this creation encompasses all the possible facets of everyday life. Logically then, one could argue that we actively create and

destroy, we actively order, define, structure, and program, we actively make the abstract “real” and the incomprehensible understandable, all in the course of our relations with other people. Collectively we produce the “mainstream” and legitimate what we choose to label as such, we select norms and ideals to live by, and we assure that these norms are as fluid and static as is necessary for us, and are provided to the next generation virtually without their realization that it is being done (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Some researchers have even stated that it is not primarily reality creation that occupies us as a people, but it is reality re-creation on which we spend a majority of our time and energy, since little of what we create is truly original to us alone (Sjostrand, Sandberg & Tyrstrup, 2001).

Unfortunately, even though everything we generally know as real is the result of such mediated construction, “Habitualization and institutionalization in themselves limit the flexibility of human actions” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 116). According to this perspective, being as embedded in an essentialist and realism dominated society that praises objectivity and seeks a singular truth as many of us are, the notion of inflexibility should not be surprising. For each of us, reality is socially defined, but the definitions are always embodied; in other words, flesh and blood individuals working in conjunction with one another serve as definers of reality (Berger & Luckmann, p. 116). Thus, our creative powers are actually solidly grounded in our real life interactions with others, and touch upon virtually all facets of the world around us. Our humanness tends to limit as much as free us. Under constructionism, we are not dealing with the ethereal, but an ability grounded in real-world practice to change our perceptions, recreating reality in

part or in whole, and allowing flexible understandings to emerge. For example, Morgan (1997), using a metaphorical lens to examine organizations as cultures, noted how “organizations are socially constructed realities” (p. 120), and stated that such a view “can be important in empowering people to take greater responsibility for their world by recognizing that they play an important part in constructing their realities” (p. 152). By virtue of such statements, I am led to ask just how empowering it might be for individuals to realize that they can construct themselves as leaders. Our own perceptions are positioning us to act, and to take part in “real life” in a physical sense, and acquiring tools that will allow us to alter those perceptions, in essence redefining what we know to be “real”, is an extremely powerful realization.

In Chapter 1, I anchored the call for seeing leadership in a new way in the concept of a pluralistic society, one that embraces diversity in all forms and advocates in a balanced fashion in the interests of all. Pluralistic societies have what Berger and Luckmann call a “shared core universe” (1966, p. 125). They go on to indicate that “Pluralism encourages both skepticism and innovation, and is thus inherently subversive of the taken for granted reality of the traditional status quo” (p. 125). The point here is that we need to go beyond the taken for granted definitions of everyday constructs, like that of leader, and think in new and more creative terms that are in accord with a subjective, relativistic, holistic and pluralistic society. This effort may involve utilizing a newer and less traditional epistemology, one like social constructionism, with which to perceive and understand our everyday reality and the constructs that compose it. When

we do so, we are allowed to question the status quo because, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated:

Every individual is born into an objective social structure within which he encounters the significant others who are in charge of his socialization. These significant others are imposed upon him. Their definitions of his situation are posited for him as objective reality. He is thus born into not only an objective social structure but also into an objective social world. The significant others who mediate this world to him modify it in the course of mediating it. They select aspects of it in accordance with their own location in the social structure, and also by virtue of their individual, biographically rooted idiosyncrasies. The social world is “filtered” to the individual through this double selectivity (p. 131).

Following this rationale, questioning is both necessitated and legitimated because of the nature of our socialization processes. Due to the structure of our society and the way that knowledge, from the most basic to the most complex, is shared and assimilated, the individual not only has the roles and viewpoints of others directly placed upon him or her, but in the process of socialization actually takes on the life-world of another person (or persons). This phenomenon is not limited by culture, geographic location, or time, though it may manifest itself in different forms and varying strengths. We each learn to accept a prescribed reality that, at the very least, partially structures our lives. Over time, this reality is internalized, as seen when Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated:

Society, identity, and reality are subjectively crystallized in the same process of internalization. This crystallization is concurrent with the internalization of language. Indeed, for reasons evident from the foregoing observations on language, language constitutes both the most important content and the most important instrument of socialization (p. 133).

If language and interaction create reality, it logically follows that we can also use language to re-socialize ourselves, if not in toto, then in part, redefining some aspect of our reality, or altering some construct according to different and perhaps self-selected

precepts. We could, in essence, decide to construct ourselves as leaders, and do so according to the tenets that we ourselves select, and make real through social processes. Supportive of this is the idea that Berger and Luckmann (1966) indicate is the most important vehicle we use to maintain (and create) reality, conversation. This idea is also in agreement with the understanding that individuals can, indeed, break-out of the “objective” reality imposed upon them by society, and create a new version for themselves, and that doing so is anchored not only in language, but in social interaction. It would seem that reality is truly neither static nor stable, nor is it existent apart from our interactions with other people; ultimately reality is highly pliable.

Our social world is available for alteration, and all constructs within that world . are open to change. Thus, my hypothesis in this study is that our understandings of leaders are available for construction and reconstruction; they are changeable and adaptable because they are socially constructed. Morgan (1997) indicated that “powerful leaders seem to symbolize so many aspects of their organization. But it is really important to recognize that formal leaders do not have any monopoly on the ability to create shared meaning” (pp. 136-137). In essence, the exercise of leadership is available to anyone despite a formal designation or label; leadership is socially constructed and lies outside any notion of what “should be”. Often, when questioned adequately, as can easily be seen in the case of disability, a label will simply disappear.

Since there has historically been a lack of research utilizing a social constructionist framework since there is all too often a lack of a clear articulation of the assumptions that underlie the epistemology (Hacking, 1999), which leads to confusion

and misunderstanding, this study will actively guard against this. Thus, the assumptions upon which our view of social constructionism is based will be made quite evident before proceeding.

Burr (2003) identifies four basic assumptions (see Appendix A – *Assumptions of a Social Constructionist Epistemology* for an expanded list) of a social constructionist epistemological position. First, it takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge; second, it establishes historical and cultural specificity; third, it sustains knowledge through social processes (particularly discourse); and fourth it asserts that knowledge and action go together (i.e., discourse positions actors). Thus, using a social constructionist epistemology, a high level of subjectivity is evident when examining any construct, whether it is the disabled or the leader serving as the subject of the examination. We see that the existence of any absolute definition, the existence of any essential truth regarding a designation or construct is quickly called into question, and, as a “pure” social constructionist might assert, is in fact completely impossible to find. Essentially, there is no “right” position to adopt since by following the logic of the four basic assumptions of constructionism outlined above, we are left with a subjective, historically and culturally specified discourse-generated examinee. As a post-modernist epistemology, social constructionism rejects the notion of any “overarching orderly schema and explanation . . . [and it] frees society at least to some extent from the tyranny of one voice, one ideology, and one set of meanings” (O’Farrell, 1999, p. 6). Post modernism, of which, as indicated previously, social constructionism is a part, is seen as being another lens that, according to Morgan (1997),

. . . thrives on paradox, and the relativism of competing points of view. It emphasizes how in opening horizons and perspectives we also close others, and how the attempt to gain particular kinds of insights or ‘truths’ inevitably leads to distortions (p. 429).

In essence then, we can only ever view a construct like leadership in shadow since we have no genuine access to an objective reality, and we are always subjects who “engage objective realities subjectively” (Morgan, 1997, p. 429). As will be demonstrated in the next section of this literature review, metaphor has theoretical and real-world practical capacities very similar to those ascribed to post modernism and social constructionism, making them very compatible components for use in this study.

This review is not an attempt to assert the value of any particular social construct, or to critique and debate the social constructionist epistemology itself. Social constructionism is highly complex, existing as it does at different levels, such as those of “light” and “dark”, and “strong” or “weak” (O’Farrell, 1999). This discussion is more of an attempt to show how adopting this specific epistemology, and thus showcasing a specific social construct, in this case the one known to us as “leader”, can enhance or diminish that construct by prompting the actor to take or avoid taking certain actions or to participate in or avoid participating in certain activities. As a construct that fully owes its existence to individual and socially defined parameters, communicated through discourse, and anchored in context, a leader can be created (constructed) or destroyed (deconstructed) using the tools central to social constructionism; interaction and language (discourse). The use of the terms language and discourse in this case refer to both the spoken and the written word, and encompass all the methods that people use to

communicate with one another on a daily basis. Burr (2003) commented skillfully on the power and nature of discourse when she stated,

A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light. If we accept the view . . . that . . . a multitude of alternative versions of events are potentially available through language, this means that surrounding any one object, event, person, etc, there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the object [or construct] in question, a different way of representing it to the world (p. 64).

Thus, we see in evidence here, not only commentary on discourse that is of a general nature, but specific mention of the use of story and metaphor in the creation of a construct, and direct inference to the power of language and discourse to create alternate versions of reality. As a socially constructed perception, leadership is directly affected by language and discourse.

In the field of psychology, the concept of social constructionism goes back to Gergen (1973), where we find the first major assertions (within the field) that are promoting the concept that all knowledge is historically and culturally specific. Additionally, during this time, another important and complimentary assertion was made; there is no point in looking for any one particular “truth”, since social life is continually changing and thus, so are the meanings that are associated with words, concepts and explanations (Gergen, 1973). Truth was seen as individually created, ever evolving, and fully related to culture and to context.

At the same time that Gergen was writing here in the United States, Harre (as cited in Burr, 2003) was writing in the United Kingdom, and implied that language has a

role that is more substantial than that of being a simple tool used to describe things, and he asserted that language is a valid social resource for constructing varied accounts of the world and of events. Language was seen as being a way of attributing meaning, and of building a personal version of reality; one that is subject to change or remain fixed according to the pressures applied by the majority (or, in the case of this study and those like it, according to the personal wishes or needs of the individuals or groups involved).

As an epistemology, social constructionism's proponents call upon us to question, to analyze and to ascertain the truth for ourselves. We are asked, once again, to take a pluralistic view that embraces the simultaneous existence of multiple versions of reality, and to see that there is really no single, over-arching way of defining anything, be it disability, a mountain, or constructs like leaders or leadership. As O'Farrell (1999) asserts in her embrace of post-modernism,

Perhaps we need to go beyond the notion of any rigidly fixed social identities, no matter how counter-cultural these might be, and to engage in an on-going and open-ended process of negotiation. The aim of this negotiation would not be the kind of vague consensus which is the modernist ideal, but a negotiation which recognizes (rather than merely tolerates) differences of all kinds and not simply those which are the current flavour of the month . . . instead of using education to train students to calmly accept their fate as specialized and highly regulated workers . . . students should be invited at every possible opportunity to consider and imagine alternative scenarios no matter how seemingly impractical (p. 6).

Here we see a direct challenge, matching Morgan's (1997) discussed earlier, to go well beyond the normal and accepted parameters evidenced by modernist conceptual systems, be they in education or elsewhere, and are given direction to establish new techniques which will be applied in new ways. Here, we are given the power to create both ourselves

and one another, and to explore all the diversity that surrounds this creation, seeing it all as valuable, possible and changeable.

Chapter 3 of Gergen's (1999, pp. 62-89) text is titled "Discourse and Emancipation", which is itself a reference to the ability of language (discourse) and interaction to both construct and deconstruct realities. I use the term "realities" here because, as a "soft subjectivist" I am acknowledging the fact that, for all of us, there is more than one way to understand something; this is so because we are individually and collectively capable of creating various "realities" for ourselves and for one another.

Multiple realities exist. As Rorty stated (as cited in Gergen, 1999),

[We must] appreciate the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important – an appreciation which becomes possible only when one's aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description (p. 62).

Gergen (1999) also revealed an important linkage when he suggested the notion of discourse as structure, and described the use of metaphor, as a tool of discourse, in establishing structure (which can be seen as the practical side of metaphor). We, as beings, are structured (i.e., constructed, arranged, and ordered) to one degree or another, and, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) indicated, not only is it possible to say that "man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or, more simply, than man produces himself" (p. 49). Social order is thus not seen as innate to humans, or even as part-and-parcel with society, but instead as fully a product of human interaction. Social order is a result of us interacting with one another, and together defining both individual personhood and collective realities as we progress through time. Because words gain the status of truths (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) as the years pass

within any given community (they are internalized), words create the very nature of that community, and thus they create what is real for the individuals that are a part of that community. It follows, as I suggested previously, that if we can use words to create, we can also use them to enhance, mitigate and destroy anything we can refer to as a “construct”, be it a leader or something else. Whether you choose to call it truth, whether you choose to call it reality, or whether you choose to call it by another name, language gives us the power to create and to destroy it, virtually at will.

Describing Morgan’s (1997) perspective, Gergen (1999) highlighted the power of metaphor to contribute not only to reality construction but to enhancing the over-all conceptual understandings held by each individual and to the generation of effective practices (talked about, in this case, in a managerial and organizational context). In his research, Morgan made it obvious that most of the significant ways in which we are able to understand organizations, and therefore to understand how to live within them, have a metaphorical base. As Gergen says “they are lived fictions in a world where there is no living beyond fiction” (1999, p. 176). Again, it is implied here that there is more than one way to see or understand something, that there is more than one reality, and, in the case of Morgan (1997), if any manager in any organization truly wants to be successful (however that is defined for them), they must be not only capable, but skilled at, seeing things through multiple lenses. Managers (or anyone in a leadership position) must be able to use the various lenses available to them to view reality alternatively and be competent in moving forward on the insights that the use of such viewpoints generates.

Morgan (1997) also directly addresses the power of using metaphor as a lens to aid understanding and perception formation when he indicates that true understanding lies in our ability to see that many different things, theories or perspectives for example, are really part of a single whole. In other words, multiple perspectives or theories must be considered in order to insure true and full comprehension, true understanding, true perception. Multiple perspectives underlie any singular perception, eliminating its singularity. Leaving additional perspectives out, we will never have a complete picture. Morgan (1997) indicated,

This is exactly what an understanding of the role of metaphor helps us to do. When we recognize that competing theories are competing metaphors, we can approach them in a new way. We can learn to see and tap their strengths and be aware of their inevitable weaknesses. We can set the grounds for a much more reflective approach to management practice, where people rather than theories are in the driving seat (p. 376).

Thus, metaphor is running parallel with the tenets of both post-modernism and social constructionism in its embrace of diversity and its disdain for singularity.

Miles and Huberman (1994) touch on the place metaphor has in creating theory. They stated that the people they study “use metaphors constantly as a way of making sense of their experience” (p. 250), and that this is similar to what researchers do when they examine their data; they use it to make sense of experience, to understand, explain, and clarify. In addition, they attribute several abilities to metaphor that are notable (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 250-252): first, they [metaphors] are data reducing, that is they allow us to take several “particulars” and make a single “generality” out of them; second, they are pattern making devices, helping to place patterns within the larger context in which they are embedded (making them more understandable); third, they are

decentering devices, meaning they require higher-level cognitive processing; lastly, they are ways of connecting findings to theory, “effectively uniting reasoning and imagination” (p. 252). Metaphors are a bridge, and are central not only to human understanding and reality creation, but to research endeavors as well.

Creating Understanding; Literature on Metaphor Use

“What, therefore, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors . . . “
(Nietzsche, 1964)

Psychological and sociological researchers, as well as those studying education and organizational development among other subjects, have used metaphor as a tool to enhance personal and collective understanding as well as to exert influence on constructs and lived reality. Just as Wittgenstein (1958) examined how language is a social activity, Morgan (1997) views metaphor as an “active, constitutive force that leads us to enact the world in a particular manner . . . metaphor makes meaning” (p. 427). As indicated earlier in this study, Morgan (1997) used metaphor to enhance understanding of organizations by describing various “lenses” (metaphorical tools) through which an organization, itself a social construct since it’s meaning is derived collectively, can be viewed. For example, he examined organizations through the metaphorical lens of “organizations as organisms”, metaphorically giving them life, and at the same time building a metaphor-based construct that enhanced our understanding of what an organization actually “is” (Morgan, 1997). And, as a tool of discourse, metaphor may present us with an opportunity to create, enhance, mitigate, or destroy social constructions. Hulsse (2003) asserts that metaphors construct reality by projecting “everyday life-worlds” onto abstract phenomena, and that not only do we construct a reality by what we say, but also by how

we say what we say. Using metaphor is a unique way to make understandable what needs to be understood in a given circumstance, it can serve as a descriptive tool in the communication equation; thus acting as a conduit for construct creation. By virtue of this power then, metaphor can be used to reinforce and even fully construct an individual's understanding (conceptualization) of him or herself through its intentional use in communication. If our reality is socially constructed, and if all of the constructs that we create can be influenced by language and by tools of language (discourse), then metaphor, as such a tool, can be said to actually create or re-create reality.

Several authors and researchers have gone to great lengths to highlight the constructive and creative power inherent in the use of metaphor. For example, Sontag researched both illness as metaphor and AIDS and its metaphors (1989), and came to the conclusion that the language surrounding illness and disease, specifically cancer and AIDS, greatly contributes to fear and misconceptions, and, in essence, ends up creating reality for their respective "patients" (as will be shown, this term and others like it carry labels and assumptions, which in turn create reality), as well as for the rest of society. Sontag (1989) stated that "etymologically, patient means sufferer" (p. 124), showing immediately how language, even in the form of a simple singular term, sets up a reality; the word carries various assumptions and connotations right along with it, and these directly impact the individual as well as those people around them. The word has very "real world" implications; if you are a patient, then you are suffering. As will be demonstrated, metaphor can actually create an entire larger story around a much smaller concept; prompting mental images and dialogue, and linking one part of life to another.

This innate power can act to fully shape our perceptions and thus our reality. In her AIDS work, Sontag (1989) is striving to illuminate the extreme power that metaphor and language have on our understanding, and, in this case, is using research to show how understanding provided through metaphor embedded in our everyday language actually works against the best interests of the individual by casting them in a negative light and ultimately creating their victimization. Sontag (1989) stated,

Cancer is still common as a metaphor for what is feared or deplored, even if the illness is less dreaded than before. If AIDS can eventually be drafted for comparable use, it will be because AIDS is not only invasive (a trait it shares with cancer) or even because it is infectious, but because of the specific [metaphor based] imagery that surrounds viruses (p. 156).

Here we can see very clearly, again, how language can create reality, providing not only liberation for all of us, but also restriction; actors are positioned and the “real-world” is affected. Here we see evidence, once again, of how very “real-world” effects are birthed from solely theoretical or philosophical concepts. Philosophical concepts are, in this case, well grounded.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provided a highly detailed account of how we, as both a society and as individuals, use the constructive power of metaphor to shape our lives. In essence, they asserted that what we “do every day is very much a matter of metaphor” (p. 3) since our conceptual system plays a central role in defining our everyday reality. And, according to Lakoff and Johnson, since metaphor serves to greatly contribute to, structure and define that conceptual system, metaphor can be said to create reality. Now, this is not to say that the creation of our conceptual system and the things that contribute to it are wielded intentionally; much of how we understand and order the world goes on

“behind the scenes”, occurring automatically and effortlessly as we go about the business of our lives (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). So, in many instances our reality is collectively created for us without us even being aware that it is happening. This assertion is in agreement with that of the social constructionist. For example, Sjostrand, Sandberg, and Tyrstrup (2001), indicated that we are not primarily creating reality through language and interaction, but are mainly re-creating it since so much of what we create is not original to us (though we may alter or “interpret” it to some degree before passing it along, it has, ultimately, been inherited from others).

For the purposes of this study, metaphor is defined as understanding and experiencing one kind of thing, for example organizations, emotions, physical occurrences, etc., in terms of another kind of thing. Metaphor thus serves as a bridge that allows connection between understandings to occur, and perhaps novel views to emerge.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) described how we can talk about the concept of an “argument” in terms of that of a “war”, which is a metaphorical structure that is reflected in our everyday language in a substantial number of expressions. For example; “your claims are indefensible”, “I demolished his argument”, or “his criticisms were right on target”. Each of these is a result of the same “argument is war” metaphor. It is easy to see, even in just this one very basic example, how we all metaphorically-structure concepts and to imagine just what the effects of that structuring are. In examples such as these, we are bridging the gap that divides our understanding of argument with our understanding of war, and creating new understanding, new perceptions, and new realities for ourselves and for others. Singular understandings become limitless.

If you postulate structuring an argument as a journey versus a war, for example, a whole different story emerges, and it becomes obvious how many of our conventional ways of presenting the concept of “arguing” actually pre-suppose a metaphorical root that we are likely not ever conscious of. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) asserted that we might talk about arguments this way because we actually generally conceive of them this way, and that we act, individually and collectively, based upon the dictates of both individual and group conceptions, both conscious and unconscious. Our conceptions and understandings, constructed by discourse and through our interaction with others, actually serve to “position actors” (those people operating within a given context or environment), as touched upon previously. Even if you have never actually been involved in a physical altercation or fought in a war or had any similar experiences, you have been arguing in one form or another since the time that you could talk, and you still conceive of arguments, and conduct them, following the “argument is war” metaphor. Why? Lakoff and Johnson pointed out that it’s because “the metaphor is built into the conceptual system of the culture in which you live” (1980, p. 64). Thus the metaphors we act upon every day, the metaphors that position us for action, are generally not of our own choosing, but have been ascribed through history and inherited through culture. This inherited nature of metaphor is in agreement with the tenets of a social constructionist epistemology. This realization prompted other questions, however. What would the effect on our reality be if we actively utilized metaphors of our own choosing, instead of those that have been passed on to us? What empowerment lies in knowing that we have a choice?

An additional power held by metaphor is that it allows us to personify something abstract in, for example, very human terms (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The authors explain this by describing how we conceptualize, and thus how we understand, something abstract like inflation. We might say “inflation has attacked the foundation of our economy,” or “the dollar has been destroyed by inflation,” or that “inflation has given birth to a money-minded generation” (pp. 33-34). When we do such a thing, we have personified inflation. But the metaphor isn’t structured simply as “inflation is a person”; it is given the actual characteristics of a person, and characterized as in, for example “inflation is an adversary”. Not only is it personified in this instance, it is actually personified in a very particular way, which sets it up to direct action accordingly. The “inflation as adversary” metaphor actually structures reality by positioning us for action and providing us with specific perceptions about the construct (inflation), giving rise to and providing justification for, for example, political and economic actions taken by our federal government (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). With inflation constructed in this way, we can thus “set inflationary targets”, “call on the people to sacrifice in hard inflationary times”, and “declare war on inflation”. Inflation is personified as an adversary, and done so intentionally in such political examples, not only to allow mass understanding, but to position people to act and to provide rationales for their actions and/or the actions of others. Metaphor is used as a tool to alter our understandings, and can be used intentionally to do so. Viewing something as abstract as inflation in much more human terms not only makes it more comprehensible, but seen metaphorically, with metaphor as a tool of discourse and discourse able to “position actors” (Burr, 2003) as shown

previously, the ethereal becomes real since it affects us by directly affecting our lived reality (through our actions).

The purpose of this portion of the discourse review was to show explicitly how metaphor allows us to get a handle on a concept so that we can more fully understand it, and then detailed how we actually structure our reality (individually and collectively) around that very understanding. To illustrate the point further, look at the concept of love. Does love have an actual structure? Does it exist apart from the meaning we give to it? Without engaging in a deep philosophical discussion about the fact that some people may believe that love is energy (itself a metaphorical conceptualization), or that love is what “drives the soul” or is “the essence of God” (again, all comparisons metaphorical in nature), we are forced to answer that, no, removed from an individual and societal context, love has no meaning, no structure, no form. Love is ultimately socially constructed. It becomes plain to see that whatever meaning, structure, or form it has is given to it by us primarily through metaphorical conceptualization. This is very similar to the ideas about disability presented earlier in this paper (see Bishop, Foster & Jubala, 1993), and similar to what I am positing about leaders and leadership in this study. Without the societally defined label, disability is non-existent. Without a societal definition of what love is or what it should be, it is also non-existent. The same can be said for leaders and leadership.

Obviously, this research is concerned with how we understand things; concepts, experiences, objects, emotions, and similar “stuff”. This concern for how we understand leads to the need for an explanation of what it means for us to “define” something very

differently (taking a view that would, for example, define something very differently than may be the traditional or dominant way that society, our culture or some sub-group would define it). In the case of this study, I am looking to define reality from a strictly subjective standpoint, versus the highly objective stance taken by many in the scientific community, and similar or associated persons and groups who are locked into a more positivist framework.

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 118) discuss, “The standard view seeks to be ‘objective’, and it assumes that experiences and objects have inherent properties and that human beings understand them solely in terms of those properties.” Love, for example, as defined or described by an objectivist, would (actually) be composed of things such as desire, fondness and attraction. Some would say that understanding is referential; these are simply abstract descriptors used to describe another abstraction. Such attributes would be things seen as inherent (or essential) properties of the concept of love itself. They exist, thus love exists and can be understood in terms of them. Love possesses properties that are then able to be separated from it.

Against this view, and in accordance not only with a social constructionist epistemology, but that of post-modernism and metaphorical construction, we could claim that, essentially, love is comprehended only partially by those types of attributes, and that we obtain our true understanding of love by constructing the concept metaphorically, understanding “love as a puzzle”, “love as a journey” or “love as madness” instead. In such cases, we are using metaphor to bridge the gap of understanding that exists between concepts. These types of metaphorical expressions are seen as “defining concepts”

(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) which emerge from our interactions with others, and thus the concepts that are metaphorically defined are understood in terms of what are called “interactional properties”. In other words, each concept is at least partially defined by things like perception, motor activity, purpose, function, and the like. As a result, we find that our conceptualizations of things like objects, just like our conceptualizations of things such as events and activities, and of abstractions such as inflation and love, are characterized as forms called “multidimensional gestalts” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These are multiple conceptualizations that come together to form a more singular understanding, and whose very nature emerges completely naturally from our personal (our interactional and “real world”) experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They are umbrellas under which multiple concepts exist. Thus we establish that we cannot characterize our conceptualizations entirely in terms of inherent properties, but rather we must see them as developing structure and definition through interaction. They are multifaceted. They are understood, defined and constructed partially if not fully, in conjunction with other people, and specifically, via metaphor. This assertion is in agreement with the tenets of social constructionism, and goes further toward bonding it with metaphor.

Given all of the above, we can say we have fully established how conventional metaphor substantially creates our reality. Thinking of arguments in terms of war, love in terms of a journey, or personifying inflation to get a “handle” on an otherwise abstract concept and to aid us in relating it to the world is commonplace, and, as has been shown previously, occurs in many instances virtually automatically and unconsciously.

However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also address metaphor that lies outside of our everyday conventional conceptual system, indicating that “. . . metaphors that are imaginative and creative . . . are capable of giving us new understanding of our experience . . . they can give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know and believe” (p. 139). Thus, metaphors not only have creative power, but re-creative power as well, allowing us to re-define a construct, for example, and view and understand it in a novel way.

To illustrate this, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) again turn to the concept of love, this time structuring it in terms of a less conventional metaphor, “Love is a collaborative work of art” (p. 139). The authors stated that they found this metaphorical concept particularly powerful because it truly helps to make our experiences of love coherent and personally relatable, it makes sense of them. They go on to suggest that new or unconventional metaphors help us understand in the same way that conventional metaphors do; that is, they provide a coherent structure, highlighting some things, while hiding others, and acting as a bridge. This is because, like all metaphors, they give rise to “entailments” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 139-140). An entailment can be seen as a characteristic of the metaphorical conceptualization. For example, “love is work”, “love requires cooperation”, and “love creates reality” could all be said to be entailments of the “love is a collaborative work of art” metaphorical conceptualization of love. Each entailment may, itself, have further entailments; the ultimate result is that a larger and very coherent network of entailments develops which may, in general, either match or not match our own experiences of “love”. These entailments further cement metaphor’s

reality creating ability. When the network that's been created (via entailment) does fit with our various past experiences, those experiences form a coherent whole and emerge as "instances of metaphor" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 140). When this kind of fit is established, there is a full-blown cognitive connection at work, tying all of the entailments together to form a whole, and "that awakens and connects our memories of our past love experiences and serves as a possible guide for future ones" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 140). Lakoff and Johnson also elaborated upon what happens when this kind of connection occurs, explaining five "guiding points" regarding metaphor by using the "love is a collaborative work of art" metaphorical conceptualization. This explanation is important to this study because it addresses the ability of metaphor to provide new meaning, in other words to construct or reconstruct a concept, an experience, an object, etc, and grant new understanding. Their five guiding points regarding metaphor are as follows (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 141-143):

1. Metaphor highlights certain features [of something like a construct] while suppressing others. For example, looking at the concept of love as a collaborative work of art involves excluding looking at love in other ways, for example as "love is madness". This agrees with other researchers such as Morgan (1997), who indicated that "in highlighting certain interpretations it [metaphor] tends to force others into a background role" (p. 4). As will be shown in the next section, stories have a similar feature.
2. Metaphor does not merely entail other concepts, like "work" or "creating reality," it entails very specific aspects of these concepts. An example being

that viewing love through the metaphorical lens of “love is a collaborative work of art”, generates the entailment that love is work, but it is not merely simply any kind of work being referred to, it is the type of collaborative, joint, creative work that is entailed in the creation of a piece of art. Thus the concept is nuanced and very specific, and not at all general in nature. It is understood in a singular way.

3. Since metaphor highlights important areas regarding love for the individual and makes them understandable and relatable, it also masks other love experiences, leaving them fully out of the picture. Thus, love is given a new (albeit very narrow) meaning as a result. If we are able to relate to what is entailed by the metaphorical instance, then the metaphor can attain the status of truth for us. For quite a few people, “love is a collaborative work of art” is true, and because of this the metaphor can have a “feedback effect” in which we’re led to conduct ourselves in accordance with the truth that has been established through our personally relating to the metaphor. Again, as will be seen, stories have this same feature.
4. Metaphors are appropriate because they sanction actions, justify inferences, and help us set goals. Metaphor provides direction in multiple areas of life, be they related to our day-to-day tasking, or to our broader, longer-term and over-arching life schema.
5. The meaning that any metaphorical conceptualization will have for an individual will be partly determined by culture (which provides immediate

metaphorical structure to each of us at birth and varies widely), but it will be partly tied to our past experiences as well. However, flexibility and the ability to re-define remain strong as long as a person is cognizant of the constructions and conceptualizations set before them. Knowledge of how metaphor constructs reality equals power to alter that reality. Due to these cultural and historical aspects of metaphor, the same metaphorical instance that gives new meaning to my experiences may not give new meaning to another persons.

Thus, subjectivity is referenced here.

It is evident from this example referencing love that metaphor allows us to create a reality in addition to simply conceptualizing (or re-conceptualizing) any pre-existing reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, I am not insinuating, nor are the authors referenced here, that it is necessarily an easy thing to change our metaphorical conceptualizations, in essence redefining some aspect of our reality, yet alone to re-define our reality entirely. However, the power inherent in the knowledge that reality is socially constructed and is thus pliable provides each of us with an opportunity to make real changes in our lives, either piecemeal or all encompassing, particularly when we are given tools that can assist us in making the changes we want or need to make. Changes “in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 146). In addition, Morgan (1997) indicated that having the knowledge that reality is socially constructed while having the tool of understanding regarding how metaphor structures reality serves to both empower the individual and enhance our society. New metaphors, just like conventional metaphors,

have the power to define reality for each of us, and are a large component of how we understand and manage our daily lives; “In all aspects of life...we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 158). We construct our reality through language, of which metaphor is a significant part, and we create our perceptions and understandings of all things in the process.

Rationale for a Subjectivist Stance

Social scientists have shown that our descriptions of reality are not objective, but are, in fact, fully socially produced (Danzinger, 1997; Burr, 1995). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provide lengthy and detailed discussions on the topics of subjectivity and objectivity, drawing comparisons along the lines of how each of these perspectives perceives and defines what is considered to be “truth”. These discussions are important to this study due to the epistemology (social constructionism) and tool (metaphorical story-making) being used to investigate how leader and leadership perceptions can be altered.

Social constructionism, as a post modernist epistemology, holds that subjectivity is paramount to objectivity, and, in fact, is unavoidable (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1999), while both metaphor and story-making are, by their very nature, fully subjective concepts; they originate in the individual and are altered and perpetuated through interaction and language. Though Lakoff and Johnson (1980) end up calling for an alternative to both subjectivity and objectivity, what they term “experientialism”², this alternative has more in common with subjectivity than it does

² This will be elaborated on in a later section of this dissertation.

objectivity, and their explanations regarding the limitations of maintaining the generally dominant objective view of reality underlie much of this study.

Objectivity, seen as the globally socially dominant position, defines truth as being absolute and ultimate (Burr, 2003; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; O'Farrell, 1999), and thus it asks us to strive for the one singular truth or the one singular definition or understanding that we can use to construct our reality (be it our overall reality or a more narrow portion thereof). More importantly, truth for an objectivist involves concepts, objects and abstractions having inherent (essential) properties, as discussed previously. These properties are understandable to everyone (universal) and exist outside of any sort of contextual or interactional framework, and thus they exist apart from their "host" as well (see the discussion regarding metaphor and love in the previous section for more on the impossibility of this). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) indicated, "we do not believe that there is such a thing as objective truth, though there has been a long standing theme in Western culture that there is" (p. 159). Morgan (1997) rendered a critique of quantitative analysis (which relies on objectivity) that likens it to magic, and stated that:

Techniques of quantitative analysis seem to perform a similar role. They are used to forecast the future and analyze the consequences of different courses of action in a way that lends decision making a semblance of rationality and substance. The use of such techniques does not, of course, reduce risks. The uncertainties surrounding a situation still exist, hidden in the assumptions underlying the technical analysis (p. 146).

Statements such as these are in direct agreement with those seen within the epistemology of social constructionism itself, which calls for us to question assumptions and examine taken for granted knowledge (Burr, 2003), and which denies the existence of any one, singular truth, definition or approach to understanding (O'Farrell, 1999); this is also the

post-modernist's view (Lyotard, 1984). Thus, via a denunciation of objectivity, another direct linkage between social constructionism and metaphor is established.

Additionally, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) take issue with the choices that have been traditionally offered by society when it comes to choosing either an objective or subjective viewpoint. They compare the duality that we are each given by our society to choose from at birth to myopically living fully at just one of the extremes or the other. If we do not embrace objectivism (and thus also the related and underlying concepts and theory associated with it like positivism and essentialism), we are given the alternate and seemingly only other choice of subjectivism, which, though much closer to what Lakoff and Johnson themselves would espouse, is also seen as somewhat limiting in terms of our understanding and experience (mainly because it lies at the opposite extreme, espousing a virtually unlimited creativity). Each viewpoint is likened each to a myth, perpetuated by those at the extremes; each fighting for domination of our understanding, and thus our reality. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) outlined their reasoning for this belief, and went on to construct and then deconstruct the arguments for why each of the extremes is "true". They state, in brief, that objectivism and subjectivism really need each other in order to exist, each defining itself only in opposition to the other and casting the other as the enemy (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Embedded within this argument is that, in essence and theory, both of the extreme concepts miss the very significant point that we understand our world through our very real interactions with it. For example, objectivism misses the fact, as established in this study and others, that our understanding, and thus our truth, is necessarily relative to our individual and cultural conceptual system, and that

it cannot be framed in any type of absolute terms. It also forgets that human conceptual systems are proven to be metaphorical in nature (see the previous discussions on metaphor), and thus involve us actually understanding one thing in terms of another (and that, in fact, in many instances metaphorical conceptualization is the only way to understand something at all).

Subjectivism, on the other hand, misses the fact that our understanding, even in its most imaginative form, is given in terms of a conceptual system that is indeed grounded in our successful functioning in both our direct physical environment and our over-all culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), and thus our ability to create is not truly all encompassing, but limited to some small degree. However, some social constructionists may disagree with this, and we would then be entering a world closer to that of the deconstructionist, where “nothing exists outside text” (Derrida, 1976). Subjectivist positioning relies on a single basic assumption; that experience does not have a natural (grounded) structure, and thus, there can be “no natural constraints on meaning and truth” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 224). However, it has been argued and shown that our conceptual system and our actual lived experience are both very highly structured and related, particularly in terms of the development of metaphorical instances. For example, experiential gestalts are structured in addition to being structuring, and this structuring is not arbitrary, but emerges naturally through our experience and interactions, and is thus seen as being structurally grounded. Structuring emerges out of our direct “real-world” interactions with other people. In addition, within a contemplation of social constructionism, phenomenologists like Husserl, (as cited in Sjostrand, Sandberg, and

Tyrstrup, 2001) have postulated that, as “living subjects” we are always related to reality through our lived experience of that reality. Thus our actual physical lived experience grounds us.

Instead of making a choice that lies at either extreme, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) offer us a third choice; experientialism. This view successfully addresses the weaknesses inherent in both objectivism and subjectivism, though it comes theoretically closer to subjectivism than it does objectivism. Experientialism provides a middle ground.

An exclusionary duality has existed for so long in Western culture that in most cases this either/or polarization goes fully unquestioned except by those who lie at the extremes and race to degrade the view that lies opposite their own (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Experientialism offers another approach. Whereas objectivism espouses absolute truth, experientialism asserts that truth is always relative to understanding, and since understanding is based on a non-universal conceptual system composed of both culturally and self created realities, there can be more than one truth regarding any concept, object, theory or construct at any one time. Under experientialism, objectivity and inherent characteristics or properties are not necessary to find truth; essentialism is dead. It should be noted, however, that objectivism takes on a new meaning under the experientialist approach. Here “objectivity . . . involves [simply] rising above individual bias, whether in matters of knowledge or value. But where objectivity is reasonable, it does not require an absolute, universally valid point of view” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 227). What Lakoff and Johnson are stating here is that objectivity is completely relative to a

conceptual system and a set of culturally specific values; objectivism is only about rising above the bias that results from that relativity.

What is important to subjectivism is the awareness that any meaning is always relative to a person's understanding; subjective meaning is always meaning to a particular individual or group. Thus, what is meaningful for me is determined by what is important to me, which will not depend on any knowledge gained rationally alone, but will also be based upon my past experiences, my feelings, and my intuitive learning. "Meaning is not cut and dried; it is a matter of imagination and a matter of constructing coherence" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 227). Objectivism misses what is important, understood and meaningful to the individual, while subjectivism embraces it fully and without exception. Experientialism's assertions parallel those of subjectivism to a degree. However, the extreme of subjectivism carries the notion that all meaning is constructed (with absolutely no exceptions) and that the creative ability this bestows is completely unrestrained. Experientialism rejects this notion, too, since it sees subjectivism as missing the fact that understanding is gained via a conceptual system that is fully grounded in our successful functioning in our physical and cultural environments (as outlined earlier in this chapter). Experientialism is a hybrid of objectivism and subjectivism; rejecting notions proven false for each myth, while "correcting" their flaws under the tenet that truth does not lie at the extremes, but in the successful synthesis of both distant points of the stratum.

Under the experientialist perspective, truth flows directly from understanding, which flows from our functioning in the world and our interactions. It is via this understanding that this perspective meets the objectivist's requirement that there be a

truth, and it is via the coherent structuring of our experience that this perspective touches upon the subjectivist's requirement for personal meaning and significance (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Hybridization occurs. The experientialist perspective synthesizes much of what has been outlined in discussing metaphor. This perspective, like those of objectivism and subjectivism, stresses understanding as the basis for the creation of reality, but goes one step further in that it satisfies the requirements of both points of view, and melds them into a new option.

For the purposes of this study, I am defining subjectivity "softly", meaning that I am acknowledging that reality (what we perceive as real) is the result of collaborative social processes and discourse, but also acknowledging that, since social process and discourse are anchored in real world every-day interactions with others, they are grounded. Due to this grounding, there are limits to our creative potential. This view is very similar to Lakoff and Johnson's description of experientialism in that it does not reside at either extreme, but in the middle ground that exists between the theoretical and the real.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) assert that developing an understanding of ourselves is no different than developing understanding regarding anything else; self-understanding develops from our constant interactions with other people and our cultural and physical environments. Mutual understanding involves a search for commonality of experience in relation to others, and in understanding ourselves we are searching for ways to unify our own varied experiences in order to attain coherence in our lives. And, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stated,

Just as we seek out metaphors to highlight and make coherent what we have in common with someone else, so we seek out our own personal metaphors to highlight and make coherent our own pasts, our present activities, and our dreams, hopes and goals as well (pp. 232-233).

The conclusion that is ultimately reached in this discussion is that a significant part of our self-understanding lies in the search for personal metaphors that can assist us in making sense of our lives, and that we also use similar process to make sense of the world around us. To facilitate this search, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) highlight four steps that are involved in creating self-understanding. These are relevant to this study because they are in accord with social constructionism's call for questioning and flexibility, and are theory-based suggestions grounded in real-world exercise that can serve to redefine our perceptions. They are:

1. Coming to a realization regarding the metaphors that affect our lives, and understanding how and where they structure reality, and where they are not currently structuring it.
2. Creating alternative experiences for ourselves that can form the basis of alternative metaphors (those kinds of metaphors described previously as unconventional).
3. Developing a tolerance for flexibility of experience.
4. Engaging in an unending process of seeing our lives and all that they encompass through new and alternative metaphors.

This study seeks to “activate” and forward these steps for leadership. Through our acknowledgement of the role that metaphors play in creating our reality, we gain personal power, and an ability to create and re-create our understandings and perceptions (Lakoff

& Johnson, 1980) about virtually all aspects of our world. Developing new metaphors about leaders and leadership can alter our perceptions about what these constructions are, and going further by placing metaphorical understanding in the form of a story (Morgan, 1997) can assist us in bringing the new perceptions that we have gained to life even more effectively.

Communicating Commonality; Literature on Story-making

“Pure unstoried action, pure unstoried existence in the present, is impossible.”
(Randall, 1995)

In a way very similar to that of metaphor, stories are capable of adding to our understanding and to the formation of our perceptions, and thus to our reality. Additionally, stories help make the abstract understandable, and assist us in seeing ourselves in others; simply put, stories showcase how much we have in common with one another. Denning (in Patton, 2002) indicated that, “storytelling has the power to transform individuals and organizations” (p. 195).

Whether it is our understanding of a concept, a thing, or life-situation, stories can offer relatability to what might otherwise be incomprehensible or difficult for us to relate to (such attributions are also made to metaphor). Stories highlight our interconnectedness; they allow us to see our lives in terms of the lives of others, showcasing our sameness while also pointing out our differences. They are similar to metaphor in these ways as well. Metaphors allow us to understand one thing in terms of another, just as stories allow us to see ourselves and our own lives in the situations, viewpoints and lives of others. Metaphors, by their very nature, highlight certain aspects of a thing, while leaving others in the shadows (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Stories are similar in that they bring their

specific topic into our consciousness and into the present moment in their telling, but exclude those details that are either unnecessary or that do not serve the purposes at hand. In these and many other ways, story-telling and metaphors go hand-in-hand. I would actually assert that metaphors create stories by default, and that a story can actually be considered to be metaphorical if the listeners can identify with it and view their own lives through it (Berman & Brown, 2000). Take the “argument is war” metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) that was discussed in the previous section on metaphor. Doesn’t seeing arguing in terms of war not automatically create images in the mind? Does it not bring multiple different associations into our consciousness, tapping into both our past experience as well as our future thinking on the subject? And, if a story is told about an argument that a person can relate to on an individual level, it becomes automatically metaphorical since one thing (one person’s experience of an argument) is being seen in terms of another thing (someone else’s experience of an argument). To consider this further, look again at the specific personification of “inflation as an adversary” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Thinking of inflation in this manner virtually automatically lends itself to the creation of a story, hence the use of the metaphor in politics. A story can be built around it that justifies, provides a rationale, and “rallies the troops” all at once.

In the afterward of their book *Learning Journeys*, Goldsmith, Kaye and Shelton (2000) indicated that “in such a simple fashion, stories can convey much that other forms of communication cannot” (p. 206) and that stories are capable of “. . . making complex ideas understandable and even actionable.” (p. 206). Similar qualities are ascribed to both metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and social constructionism (Burr, 1995); each of

which can be said to “position actors”. Stories can make things not just understandable, but also palatable because they provide not only a context in which to understand, but impart believability that mere facts may not (Simmons, 2001) and they allow us to relate ourselves and our experiences to those of others around us. In essence, when we envision our own experiences as similar to the experience(s) of others, we find an understanding of ourselves that may have been long obscured.

In describing what is involved in designing “significant learning experiences” for students, Fink (2003) includes story-making and story-sharing in the portion of his learning taxonomy that deals with caring. That is, he discovered that courses in which the instructors were found to have created significant learning experiences for their students involved the teachers finding ways to increase the degree to which students cared about what they were learning; the use of stories was found to increase levels of caring because it enabled the students to connect with their feelings about the topic being studied, enhancing their understanding of the subject substantially (Fink, 2003). Cognitive scientists have discovered, in fact, that stories are “more memorable and better support learning and understanding than non-story narratives” (Shaw, Brown and Bromiley, in Patton, 2002), clearly demonstrating how stories and narrative shape our perceptions and our knowledge.

Clearly, stories contribute to understanding, which, in turn, contributes to the construction of reality as indicated in previous discussions on social constructionism and metaphor; understanding is directly linked to construct creation. Numerous studies have shown how story-telling, just like metaphor, allows us to make sense of things or events

and allows us to be eased into change by “setting the stage” and providing a context and a rationale for action (Simmons, 2001). The creation and sharing of stories allows us to construct our reality, and particularly when used intentionally, provides us with another tool that we can use to justify and influence “real-world” practice. Again, stories share this power with metaphor. As an example, when a metaphorical story arises and is seen as influencing the creation of policy and causing the modification of procedure, as is the case in the inflation example described earlier, we see in evidence a “real world” effect that is the outcome of the use of the tool. This connection provides additional strength to the linkage between social constructionism, metaphor and story-making.

Simmons (2001) outlined multiple reasons why stories are growing increasingly important as our world becomes more complex and information-rich. Among the assets that stories and story-telling possess, and one that is important to this study, is that “story doesn’t grab power, story creates power” (p. 29). Here she indicated that, through the power of story, anyone can be a leader; “you do not need a position of formal leadership when you know the power of story” (p. 29). By this Simmons means that story can both influence our perceptions and creep into our unconscious, in essence “positioning actors” (Burr, 2003) as described earlier in this section and dissertation, and constructing our reality. Simmons (2001) also commented on the power of stories to make things that may otherwise not be readily understandable available to us, and indicated that story can assist us in “reframing” events, situations, and perceptions. Stories are especially important to leaders and leadership in an increasingly interconnected world because, as Simmons (2001) indicated,

Providing a story that adds a new viewpoint to your listeners internal perspective helps them think about their choices in a novel context. In the case where choices are unconscious a story can provide a new viewpoint that is more conscious . . . [and] often self-awareness is enough to change behavior (p. 47).

Clearly then, stories are powerful tools for shaping not only our perceptions, but our reality itself through the influence that they exert on those perceptions. Like metaphor, story-making and telling can serve as tools of change, and the knowledge that, for example, leaders and leadership are pliable constructs which can be influenced not only through a recognition of this quality, but by knowledge of tools that can assist us in this capacity, is extremely empowering in and of itself. Having the knowledge is power (a position), using it is powerful (an action).

Some researchers have taken story-telling out of the realm of psychology, sociology, education and anthropology³ and moved their explorations directly into organizations and the field of organizational development. For example, Boje (1991) wrote about the influence of story-telling in organizations, finding support for the position that organizations were indeed “storytelling systems” (seeing “organization as a storytelling system” is metaphorical in itself) and that stories were “. . . a key part of [an organization] member’s sense making, and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory” (p. 106). Stories were found to reconstruct an organization member’s reality, in particular when the stories were shared, formally or informally, within the organization. This reconstructive power is similar to that of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) as outlined in previous discussions. Boje (1991) described how most stories take place amidst conversation, as opposed to in

³ These are the areas in which story-telling has traditionally been used and researched.

written or other formats, and that the process of storytelling is dynamic, involving an exchange between the story teller or tellers and the listener or listeners. Over time, due to the nature of this type of information sharing, stories can be said to be constructed primarily in conjunction with others; they are based on our interactions with other people and emerge as “edited” over the course of time. Just like metaphorical instances or conceptualizations, we see that stories are directly related to context, and in fact are fully embedded within it, and that “their meaning unfolds through the storytelling performance event” (Boje, 1991).

Numerous other researchers have not only referenced the power of storytelling, but have used it as the tool that it quite obviously is. For example, Gardner (1995) states “leaders achieve their effectiveness chiefly through the stories they relate” (p. 9). He went on to tell the stories of numerous notable leaders of recent times, like Martin Luther King, Jr., Margaret Thatcher, Eleanor Roosevelt and Mahatma Gandhi. Gardner used each story to “create a leadership reality” for individuals in the study, allowing readers to form a better understanding of what leaders and leadership can be. A bridge was built that linked one understanding to another. Again, we see that, just like metaphor, stories create a reality, form perceptions, and serve to enhance individual and group understanding.

Hagadorn and Rae (2004) show how dramatically the sharing of a personal story can help individuals reconstruct themselves in new and different ways. They shared the story of a Cambodian immigrant named Arn-Chorn Pond, and described how he was able to “refigure the narrative” of his life (p. 57), witnessing first hand the ability of storytelling to change self-perceptions. It should also be noted here, however that this

process was dynamic, and involved Arn sharing his story with others, who it may be said, reflected back a new reality to him and allowed him to see himself in new ways.

Perceptions were altered, a bridge of understanding was created, and Arn was reconstructed. He left behind a painful past and remade himself; Arn was now fully capable of facing life in what was a new land for him, America. Hagadorn and Rae (2004) stated,

Human narrative is experienced through the lens of a three-fold present made up of past-present, future-present, and present-present. Past and future are never experienced as fact but through an interpretation of them from where one is situated in the present . . . As a result, humans have the capacity to assign new meanings to the past and imagine multiple possibilities for the future. This opens the door to regard life as a work of fiction, not in the pejorative sense of falsehood but in the ennobling sense that one can become the creative author of life and, by extension, organizations and society” (p. 55).

Bruner (1990), a cultural psychologist, suggested that narrative and story-making are a means for creating the exceptional as real and relatable, and for forming a bridge to the ordinary. He goes on to argue that we actually make meaning of life events through the act of story-telling, in essence creating understanding and shaping both meta (“big picture”) and micro (“localized”) reality for ourselves and one another along the way.

We see in story-making numerous similarities to the creative power of metaphor, which is also highly contextually based and allows us to assign and reassign meanings to many areas of our lives. Additionally, stories have the clear ability to convey complex ideas and experiences easily, and are seen as providing a very powerful method for doing so because they possess the capacity to resonate with others (Hagadorn and Rae, 2004). Metaphors do not create themselves, stories do not tell themselves, and leadership does not happen by itself. All of these things occur in relationship; the result of our

interactions with those around us, in particular through conversation and social exchange. Clearly, social constructionism, metaphor, and stories are dynamically linked together.

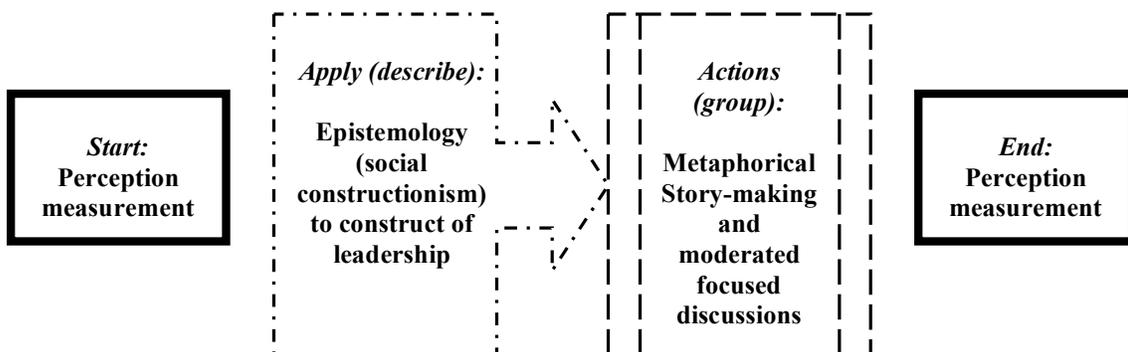
Berman and Brown (2000), discuss how story-telling is not only a way of conveying information or sharing knowledge, but that it can actually serve as a “vehicle to deliver messages to the subconscious where the ‘a-ha’ of metaphor takes place” (p. 3). Like other researchers, they state that metaphor not only allows us to learn, but that, in many cases, it is the only way to understand something at all. This is true particularly with abstract and subjective concepts like love, which is just one of many things for which this could be said to be so (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Berman and Brown (2000) are going one step further here, however, and putting forth the notion that metaphor actually allows us to learn in a subtle way, easing new conceptualizations and understandings directly into our subconscious, where they can become lived reality over time (they become internalized). And, as psychology has shown, when the subconscious is activated, the new idea, concept or perception can be instilled with little or no resistance (Berman & Brown, 2000). As counselors, these authors have used both the power of metaphor and the power of storytelling to assist their clients in reconstructing their lives. They stated that “metaphor is powerful because it parallels life; the story is dynamic because it captivates. When a metaphor is embedded in a story, the captivation of the listener activates the subconscious, and the metaphor is absorbed” (Berman & Brown, 2000, p. 4). Thus, when a story is developed around a metaphorical conceptualization, the combination is an extremely powerful tool of discourse that can, when used intentionally or unintentionally, create or re-create reality for any one of us.

As malleable social constructions, individual perceptions of leaders and leadership may be altered through the use of metaphorical story-making; this is a tool capable of dramatically changing reality for anyone willing to use it.

Theoretical Model

Sellitz, Wrightsman, and Cook (as cited in Stillman, 2005, p. 404) define a theory as a “set of concepts plus the interrelationships that are assumed to exist among those concepts”. That is, the outcomes that logically flow from the relationships posed within the theory should be hypotheses that are testable by the researcher (Stillman, 2005). This definition of theory generated the following theoretical model (Figure 1), which serves as the basis of this study, and which influenced the selection of the methodology this is described in Chapter 3. The model will be developed as this dissertation progresses, developing into the research methodology model described in Chapter 3.

Figure 1 – Theoretical Model



Importance of the Theoretical Linkage

If we, as individuals, are born of relationship, as proposed in [this dissertation], what follows? Is this simply a fancy metaphor – possibly inventive and even inspirational – but ultimately inconsequential outside academic walls? This is always the danger of intellectual work – trusting that what is printed actually makes a difference in the world.

However, in the present case there is good reason to believe in an active relationship between words on the page and in the street. For the constructionist words are themselves a form of social practice and it is imperative that these practices not remain closeted in the house of privilege.

(Gergen, 1999, p. 142)

Constructionist research is important primarily because of the broad range of implications that are introduced (for example for instruction, organization development, leadership education, and qualitative research methodology, among other things) when it is used. When an extensive examination of the history of this study's theoretical model is undertaken, and when we reflect upon its potential uses, a myriad of possibilities arise for theorists and practitioners⁴.

First, though perhaps not most importantly, this model heeds the call of other researchers (Hulsse 2003; Lambert, 1995; O'Farrell, 1999; among many others) to devote more time and energy to studies of leadership that use alternative social and educational research methodologies, in particular calling for the investigation into ways that we can evolve the methods used, formally or informally, to prepare individuals for various types of leadership roles. Examining leadership perceptions as socially constructed realities which are subject to influence and available for change can assist educators and researchers in heeding this call.

⁴ Though some prefer to see theory as more important than practice, or vice versa, this study holds that they are equally important and are in a mutual relationship of influence with one another.

Calls for the evolution of our leadership paradigms were evidenced in the assertions of educational researchers like Lambert et al. (1995) when, for example, they stated “We need educational leaders who are prepared differently than those who now inhabit the schools. We need teachers who perceive themselves first and foremost as educational leaders” (p. 194). I would venture to extend this assertion even farther however, claiming that the benefits of “differently prepared” leaders extend far beyond the scope of just our system of education; leaders in every sector, both public and private, can benefit from leadership preparation that stresses self-knowledge, self-exploration, and empowerment first and foremost, and encourages an understanding of the power that is held within the realization that a leader is a malleable social construction, and thus, that “leader” is a hat that we all can wear when desired or required. Viewing leaders and leadership as social constructions, and the use of both metaphor and story-making, in conjunction or alone, can help make the true nature of “leader” (or virtually any construct) evident and enhance individual self-understanding to the point of total reconstruction of the construct for the person using the tool(s).

Second, I think it is quite safe to say that most people assume the role of leader in some capacity over the course of their lives, and for most of us this happens quite frequently at various different personal and professional levels. Thus, there are implications for all segments of society and all individuals to be found here. As our world grows ever more complex, as societies merge and become increasingly inter-connected, as cultures are shaped and re-shaped by technology, education, and the environment, leadership needs to assume the use of a new paradigm, one that embraces rapid change,

high levels of interaction, collaboration, diversity and tenets of pluralism. Hierarchical, individualistic, and/or trait-based models are no longer as useful as they once were.

Being seen as a social construct is of benefit to the field of leadership because in our world today, a world fully socially constructed by each of us according to our needs, tastes, socially defined understandings of “normalcy”, and immediate context, a leader is required to be adaptable and flexible. We should be able to tailor what being a leader “is” to the varying audiences that are encountered, and social constructionism allows for this tailoring. Constructionism allows for situation by situation, person by person re-invention of the leader-self. As Foucault (1972) had said “the judges of normalcy are everywhere”; seeing leader and leadership perceptions as malleable constructs may enable us, individually and collectively, to satisfy those “judges” who emerge seeking leaders who are highly adaptable and are of open heart and mind.

The ripple-effect that could occur, and may, in fact, be occurring now, extends well beyond the time and space limitations of a single qualitative study, but should be somewhat self-evident, reaching as it does far beyond the borders of the narrow examination of education or leadership and into each and every area in which a social construct can be said to exist. To a social constructionist philosopher and historian like Foucault (1972), that would include every area and cover everything, even the construction we create to represent our individual selves each and every day.

Third, and perhaps most importantly to any social constructionist, this research can be seen as advancing a general understanding of the social constructionist epistemology itself. As a tool which aids understanding, social constructionism is being

seen more frequently in journal articles, books, and dissertations, and researchers like Gueldenzoph (2004) are even applying constructionist theory to things like distance learning and on-line study; mixing philosophy, linguistics, sociology, psychology and education with technology, and using basic constructionist and constructivist concepts to help their students learn. Life is becoming more interdisciplinary than ever, and theory and practice need to be just as interdisciplinary if they are to be effective in these environments.

If nothing else comes of an individual's introduction to constructionism and to discovering the power of metaphor and story, anyone can be said to benefit from being shown a different way of looking at life and how we make sense of the world. It is hoped, however, that more researchers can heed the calls of those like Lambert et al. (1995) who advocate integrations of practice, theory, and epistemology, those who offer a multi-disciplinary and pluralistic approach to teaching leadership, and those like the educators at Seattle's Berkana Institute who are utilizing a community-collaborative model of leader-training. This study is another step toward furthering these goals.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This study investigated changes in individual leadership perceptions and validated a tool of influence that could be used when such perceptions were understood as socially constructed (meaning that they resulted from language and interaction). From a perspective that viewed the role of “leader” and the broader conceptualization (action) of “leadership” as products of social agreement, this study examined whether the tool of metaphorical story-making (specifically the use of the metaphor “leaders as social constructions”) influenced an individual’s understanding of the constructs described, and, if so, in what ways. This study specifically sought to examine participant’s leadership understandings along a flexible versus inflexible continuum; attempting to describe them both before and after a focus group intervention to see what changes, if any, were evidenced by exposure to the constructionism based metaphor “leader as social construction”.

As outlined in detail in Chapter 3, the data collection activities themselves consisted of the following; perception measurement via Q-Sort, a focus group discussion revolving around the “leader as social construction” metaphorical-story, and a second perception measurement via Q-Sort, followed by a brief (written) interview procedure. This schema was specifically designed to reveal the participant’s leadership perceptions both before and after the focus group “intervention” was conducted, using Q-Methodology and written interviews to provide the raw data from which the study question was answered.

This chapter is organized in terms of the specific research questions posed in Chapter 1 (and reviewed below). It is ordered as follows: first, a restatement of the research problem; second, a restatement of the research question, a re-examination of the unit of analysis, and a description of the study participants; and third, an overview and analysis of the study's findings in general and in-depth. Since Q-methodology was the primary means of data collection in this study, this chapter first reports the results of the initial and secondary (pre and post focus group) Q-Sort exercises (which measure individual perceptions). It then provides a comparison of the results that each of the participants' Q-sorts revealed (which were obtained through basic statistical analysis using PQMethod Software as detailed in Chapter 3). This is followed by the presentation of findings from both the written interview and the focused group discussions (which will be used to more fully describe the data obtained from the Q-Sort exercise). The chapter ends with conclusions about the study's findings, and sets-up the transition to Chapter 5.

Restatement of the Research Problem

This study explored the lack of leadership practice and research paradigms that are based upon perceptions of leaders and leadership as pliable social constructions. A literature review concluded that the traditional approaches and theories tend to take a more individualistic, hierarchical, essentialist or trait-based view (and are therefore not constructionist in nature), and tend to advocate singular understandings. And, while many of the more recent theories are more collaborative or acknowledge the social aspect of leadership theory and practice, they tend towards passivity (i.e., leaders emerge by

default during group processes), which does not allow them enough flexibility to be truly useful in the increasingly interconnected contexts in which we now find ourselves.

The purpose of this study was to build upon research that utilizes a social constructionist epistemology when examining leaders and leadership, and to explore the ways we can influence individual understandings. I was seeking to discover how leadership perceptions can be altered by metaphorical story-making when it is intentionally used as a tool of discourse, and when leaders and leadership are seen as being fully socially constructed. As a constructionist, I believe that the construct “leader”, as it applies to the individual, can be created, enhanced, mitigated or destroyed via interaction and language, and I sought to document the effect that the use of the metaphor “leader as social construction”, when used in focused group discussions, had on individual leadership perceptions; making obvious the highly pliable nature of the construct, and allowing it to be seen as available to everyone in all contexts in which they might find themselves. This study examined understandings along a “flexible versus inflexible leadership” continuum, hypothesizing that use of the metaphor in a focused group discussion might alter individual perceptions about the nature of leadership, specifically, making them more flexible in nature. Thus, this study first set-out to discover what the participant’s initial views about leadership were, focusing specifically on notions of leaders and leadership as being “essential/inflexible” or “contextual/flexible”. After the introduction of the “leader as social construction” metaphor in focused discussions with the participants, their views regarding leaders and leadership were re-examined in an effort to determine what difference, if any, the use of

the metaphor made in their individual understandings.

Restatement of the Research Question

The specific two-part research question that guided this study was: (1) to what extent and (2) in what way(s) are individual graduate business and public administration students' perceptions of leaders and leadership altered (along a "flexible/inflexible continuum") by the intentional use of the metaphor "leader as social construction" in focused group discussions?

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was "individual leadership perceptions", and the population analyzed was individual graduate-level business and public administration students at a mid-sized university in the Pacific Northwest (see Appendix F – *Participant Data Profile Summary* for a more detailed description of this study's population). As Patton (2002) indicated, "the key issue in selecting and making decisions about the appropriate unit of analysis is to decide what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study" (p. 229). In the case of this study, I wanted to be able to describe the extent to which the individual leadership perceptions (along a flexible/inflexible continuum) of graduate business and public administration students had been altered as a result of using a specific metaphor in focused group discussions.

Description of Study Participants

Approximately 600 possible participants were directly¹ solicited for this study; from that solicitation, approximately 25 indicated interest² in participating, 10 enrolled³, and 5 participated⁴. Participants were able to choose between two study-sessions held on consecutive Mondays, or two sessions held on consecutive Thursdays in February 2007. There were two men and three women in this study. Two participants were enrolled in the university's College of Arts and Sciences Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program, and three participants were enrolled in the university's School of Business and Economics Master of Business Administration (MBA) Program (since these groups were thought likely to have pre-defined understandings about leaders and leadership). Four of the participants were in the 26-35 year-old age range, while one participant was in the 36-45 year-old age range. There were no participants 25 or under or 46 or older in either of the study groups. Appendix E – *Participant Data Form and Informed Consent* shows how basic participant data was gathered.

Findings

The remainder of this chapter deals specifically with study data. This section provides a general overview of the findings, and is followed by sections that specifically

¹ Via e-mail, in-class presentations by the researcher, and faculty announcements, as outlined in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

² Interest was indicated by e-mail or phone contact with the researcher.

³ Enrollment was done via a website (participants would sign-up on the website and receive communication about the study sessions by e-mail or by visiting the site). The site can be viewed here: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LeaderPerceptionStudy/>

⁴ Participation is defined as showing up for two consecutive study sessions as required, taking all administered instruments and participating in a focus group. All of the participants who started this study followed it through to its conclusion.

examine the data generated by each specific data collection method. Initial (first) Q-Sort data are examined, followed by second Q-Sort data, a comparison of the first and second Q-Sort data results, written interview data and, lastly, focus group data (which is tertiary, but descriptive). The chapter will conclude by addressing the research question, specifically in light of the data obtained, with the chapter conclusion laying the groundwork for Chapter 5 – *Conclusions and Recommendations*.

First Q-Sort Results

The first Q-Sort was administered during study session one, and took place right before the focused group discussion using the “leader as social construction” metaphor. This first Q-Sort ranking exercise was intended to elicit study participants’ initial (i.e. – current) understandings about leaders and leadership. As outlined in Appendix C – *Q-Set Statements*, each participant was required to rank 42 statements about leadership. These statements focused specifically on the “flexible versus inflexible” understandings of the constructs that each participant (and a general population) may have held. For example, if leaders and leadership are understood as socially constructed, they are seen as flexible and changeable, versus, for example, understanding leaders and leadership as exhibiting and/or requiring a specific trait or characteristic (such as charisma), which would render them more inflexible, and make them more exclusionary. After receiving brief instructions about how to complete the ranking exercise, each of the five participants rank-ordered the statements on a “most disagree” to “most agree” continuum, as seen in Appendix B – *Sample Q-Sort Score Sheet Showing Researcher Selected Distribution*. Q-Methodology requires that each participant think deeply about their feelings on a

particular subject (in this case, leaders and leadership), by forcing participants to narrow down their views (van Exel & de Graff, 2005) during the ranking exercise. For example, in the case of this study, each participant could only “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” with a total of four (two “strongly agree” and two “strongly disagree”) out of 42 statements, even though their initial choice may have been to select many more or one less than two.

Analysis of the data, done by computer using MQMethod 2.0.6, which is a statistical software package for Macintosh tailored to the analysis of data generated through the Q-Sort process, showed mixed results (Appendix H – *Statements Most Agreed With and Most Disagreed With Per Participant* summarizes findings for all 5 participants on all Q-Sort exercises). While there were multiple statistically significant distinguishing statements⁵, meaning that there were significant differences between participants who ranked the statement as “most agree” and those who ranked it as “most disagree” (i.e., the participants ranked the statements less similarly), there were fewer statistically significant consensus statements shown⁶, meaning that the statements were ranked more similarly by participants. It should be noted that this study is concerned with consensus statements because it specifically examines individual understandings about leaders and leadership at the group level, and the consensus statements most represent group-level individual understanding because agreement is evidenced. As Donner (2001, p. 7) indicated, “consensus elements are elements generally agreed on by members of

⁵ 28 statements (out of a possible 42) were significant at the $P < .05$ level, and 24 were significant at the $P < .01$ level.

⁶ 18 statements (out of a possible 42) were non-significant at the $P > .01$ level, and 14 were also non-significant at the $P > .05$ level.

most groups (everyone agrees or everyone disagrees)”. It should also be noted that Q-Methodology data analysis yields multiple types of data (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005). For example, it provides correlation matrices, factor matrices, and normalized factor scores. This study, however, only utilizes consensus statement data because the intention, as indicated above, is to examine individual group-level understandings, specifically as they relate to “flexible/inflexible” understandings of leaders and leadership. The remaining data may be used at some future time.

Consensus statements (those that do not distinguish between any pair of factors) for Q-Sort #1 are summarized in Table 1 below. The statement number and statement are followed by the statement rank and Z-Score for factors one and two, with each factor being a different rotation (i.e., a different perspective of the group of participants). Two factors were chosen based on the standard of using the number of initial factors with eigenvalues greater than one (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005).

Table 1***Q-Sort #1 Consensus Statements***

#	Statement ⁷	Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2	Leaders are born, and not made (I)	-1	-0.58	1	0.49
10	Leadership means you "induce compliance" (I)	-1	-0.80	1	0.49
12*	Leadership is nothing more than motivating (I)	0	-0.17	0	0.00
14	Leadership is a combination of the genetic and (F)	0	-0.06	-2	-0.98
16*	Leadership involves a structured hierarchy (I)	-2	-0.82	-1	-0.49
17	Leadership requires a high level of experience (I)	-1	-0.23	2	0.98
18*	Leadership flows from the top of an organization (I)	0	-0.20	1	0.49
19*	Leadership is bottom up; it starts at the bottom (I)	-1	-0.32	1	0.49
27*	We each decide, individually, who can and (F)	0	0.02	0	0.00
28*	Leadership requires charisma (I)	1	0.51	2	0.98
29*	As human beings, we collectively (F)	0	0.00	0	0.00
31*	Leadership is for the "gifted" (I)	-1	-0.33	0	0.00
32*	Leaders/leadership emerge from social (F)	2	1.09	1	0.49
35*	In a given situation or context, leadership (F)	0	0.17	-1	-0.49
36*	Leadership is adaptable versus (F)	1	0.49	0	0.00
37*	Leaders/leadership are socially constructed (F)	0	0.22	0	0.00
38*	Leaders emerge based on multiple, distinct (I)	-1	-0.64	-1	-0.49
41*	We decide collectively (F)	0	0.34	0	0.00

Note: all listed statements are non-significant at $P > .01$, and those flagged with an * are also non-significant at $P > .05$. Inflexible (I) = 10 statements, Flexible (F) = 8 statements.

These statements specifically show which understandings about leaders and leadership were in least contention among the study participants, and thus were the most agreed or disagreed with statements resulting from the initial (pre focus group) Q-Sort exercise.

⁷ Statements are truncated. Please see Appendix C – *Q-Set Statements* for details.

At the outset of the study, each Q-Statement was classified by the researcher as exemplifying either a “flexible” or an “inflexible” understanding of leaders and leadership (all 42 statements have been classified in this manner, see Appendix C, *Q-Set Statements* for additional details), and after Q-Sort number one, there were more inflexible consensus statements chosen by study participants than there were flexible consensus statements. Thus, the general understanding of leaders and leadership expressed by participants after the initial Q-Sort is classified as inflexible. In other words, the participants in this study expressed an understanding of leaders and leadership that was based more upon essentialist, objective, or hierarchical views than upon subjective, flat or alterable views. For example, Statement 2, “leaders are born and not made” was a consensus statement, as was statement 28, “leadership requires charisma”, and Statement 31, “leadership is for the ‘gifted’ (in other words, those who have some special abilities)”. Each of these statements clearly expresses subjective understandings about leaders and leadership that are inflexible (i.e., if leaders are born and not made, leadership can be said to be reserved for a special group of persons, and if leadership requires charisma, those without charisma seem to exist without the possibility of ever being a leader, unless a person can develop charisma, a question beyond the scope of this paper). As shown in Table 1, out of the 10 consensus statements categorized as inflexible that resulted from this first Q-Sort exercise, 8 statements showed dramatic differences⁸ (in the context of their categorization as consensus statements, recall that it is the fact that there was a smaller amount of difference in their rankings by the study’s participants that

⁸ A dramatic difference is the result of statements that differ in ranking in any way between the two factors analyzed.

allows their classification as consensus statements). Two statements, however, did not show dramatic differences; Statement 12, “leadership is nothing more than motivating people to achieve group or organizational goals”, and Statement 38, “leaders emerge based on multiple, distinct and identifiable factors that cannot be controlled”; these statements were ranked as neutral (as “0” on the Q-Sort score sheet) in both factor one and factor two. Thus, a majority of the consensus statements that were classified as inflexible evidenced some degree of difference in ranking between the two factors (although, in most cases, the differences were slight, see Table 1 - *Q-Sort #1 Consensus Statements* for additional details). For example, Statement 28, “leadership requires charisma”, which expresses inflexible notions about leaders and leadership, was ranked a 1 (very slight agreement) in factor one, and a 2 in factor two (slightly higher agreement), a difference of only one position. Conversely, Statement 17, “leadership requires a high level of experience” was ranked a -1 in factor one, and a 2 in factor two, a much more dramatic difference (-1 indicating slight disagreement, while 2 indicates a moderate level of agreement).

Out of the 18 consensus statements that resulted from this first Q-Sort, 8 were identified as exhibiting “flexible” understandings of leaders and leadership. Thus, it cannot be said that understandings about leaders and leadership were highly inflexible. Unexpectedly, (the researcher did not hypothesize that initial understandings would be as flexible as the first Q-Sort has shown them to be, at least among this particular group of participants) the consensus statements that emerged as examples of “flexible” leadership understandings after the first Q-Sort were those that were highly social in nature. For

example, Statement 29, “as human beings we collectively define what leadership means”, and Statement 32, “leaders and leadership emerge from our social interactions (in other words, interacting with others creates people who we think are leaders)”, are clearly social (or more flexible) understandings. Additional examples include; Statement 35, “in any given situation or context, leadership can switch from one individual to another”, Statement 36, “leadership is adaptable versus unchangeable (in other words, the concept of leadership is flexible versus inflexible), and Statement 37, “leaders and leadership are socially constructed” (that is, they are created through mutual and agreed upon definitions which result from social interactions). The presence of these statements, which can be seen as embodying the highest notions of flexibility out of the 42 possible statements that the participants were asked to rank, indicates that, while the over-all trend in their understanding about leaders and leadership after the first Q-Sort can be safely characterized as “inflexible”, the results are, to some degree, mixed. Participants seem to clearly acknowledge the presence and importance of some degree of flexibility in leadership.

The flexible consensus statements also exhibit another interesting characteristic; 4 out of the 8 statements (50%) were ranked identically under both factor one and factor two. Each of the following flexible consensus statements were ranked as “0” (neutral) on the score sheet: Statement 27, “we each decide, individually, who can and cannot be a leader”, Statement 29, “as human beings we collectively define what leadership means”, Statement 37, “leaders and leadership are socially constructed” (that is, they are created through mutual and agreed upon definitions which result from social interactions), and

Statement 41, “ we decide collectively (in other words through groups and/or the larger society) who can and cannot be a leader”. It is important to keep in mind, however, that those these are consensus statements; the consensus is that participants ranked them similarly, in this case as “0” or neutral, meaning they have no strong feelings about the statements either way (they neither agree nor disagree on any level). Based on this finding, it can be said that the consensus statements that were the most agreed upon exhibit flexible understandings about leaders and leadership, and indicate that participants have no strong feelings about these understandings. Since a majority of the consensus statements in the first Q-Sort are classified as “inflexible”, and since the consensus statements that exhibit the most agreement among participants do so only because they are ranked as neutral, it can be said again that study participants initial understandings about leadership are predominantly inflexible, but that they may be open to influence. The results of the first Q-Sort demonstrate that participant’s leadership understandings were mixed, but lean towards inflexibility.

Second Q-Sort Results

The second Q-Sort was administered to each of the five study participants at the very beginning of study session number two. One week had elapsed since the first study session took place, which had included a formal presentation on social constructionism, and which concluded with the focused group discussion about social constructionism in which the “leader as social construction” metaphor was introduced. The second sorting exercise was identical to the first; the exact same statements were utilized in the ranking exercise, and the researcher-selected distribution remained exactly the same (the

conditions in study session two were identical to those of study session one in all directly controllable ways). Participants were also given the same instructions at the outset of the session, and there was no discussion about the previous week's activities before the participants began the Q-Sort exercise (once again it was administered "cold" in an effort to expose each participant's subjective perceptions about the flexible/inflexible nature of leadership).

The goal of this second Q-Sort administration was to see if the participant's rankings had changed since the first Q-Sort administration was conducted one week earlier, and, if changes had taken place, what direction they took (i.e., did their second rankings differ greatly from their first, was there simply a slight change, or no change, and exactly how did their rankings differ between Q-sorts one and two). Each of the five participants again rank-ordered the statements on a "most disagree" to "most agree" continuum, as seen in Appendix B – *Sample Q-Sort Score Sheet*. Analysis of the data, done by computer using MQMethod 2.0.6, again showed mixed results (Appendix H – *Statements Most Agreed With and Most Disagreed With Per Participant* summarizes findings for all 5 participants on all Q-Sort exercises).

While there were multiple statistically significant distinguishing statements⁹ (meaning that there were significant differences between participants who ranked the statement as "most agree" and those who ranked it as "most disagree" (i.e., the participants ranked the statements less similarly), there were fewer statistically significant

⁹ 16 statements (out of a possible 42) were significant at the $P < .05$ level, and 14 were significant at the $P < .01$ level.

consensus statements shown¹⁰ (meaning that the statements were ranked more similarly by participants, i.e., the study participants ranked the statements similarly). As stated previously, this study is more concerned with consensus statements because it specifically examines individual understandings about leaders and leadership at the group level, and the consensus statements most represent group-level individual understanding because agreement is clearly evidenced. As Donner (2001, p. 11) indicated when describing consensus statements, “these items do not distinguish between any pair of sub-groups” (in other words, they are items that the study participants ranked similarly), and thus are suitable for examination. Again, it should be noted that Q-Methodology data analysis yields multiple types of data, but that this study only utilizes consensus statement data because the intention is to examine individual group-level understandings, specifically as they relate to “flexible/inflexible” understandings of leaders and leadership.

Consensus statements (those that do not distinguish between any pair of factors) for Q-Sort number one are summarized in Table 2 below. The statement number is followed by the statement rank (corresponding to its location on the Q-Sort score sheet) and Z-Score for factor one, followed by the statement rank and Z-Score for factor two (each factor is a different rotation, i.e., a different perspective of the group of participants). Two factors were again chosen based on the standard of using the number of initial factors with eigenvalues greater than one (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005), as well as for consistency with the initial Q-Sort.

¹⁰ 28 statements (out of a possible 42) were non-significant at the $P > .01$ level, and 26 were also non-significant at the $P > .05$ level.

Table 2***Q-Sort #2 Consensus Statements***

#	Statement ¹¹	Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2	Leaders are born, and not made (I)	0	0.17	-1	-0.71
3*	People can learn to be leaders (F)	4	1.53	2	0.92
5	Being a leader requires that a person act in certain (I)	1	0.41	3	1.47
6*	Leadership is situation and context specific (I)	2	1.05	3	1.51
8*	Leadership is the natural result of group processes (F)	-1	-0.40	0	0.04
10	Leadership means you "induce compliance" (I)	-1	-0.58	-2	-0.99
12*	Leadership is nothing more than motivating (I)	-2	-0.80	0	-0.28
13*	Leadership is strictly an effect of followership (F)	-3	-1.47	-2	-0.88
15*	Leadership is something available to a select few (I)	-1	-0.48	-3	-1.20
19*	Leadership is bottom up; it starts at the bottom (I)	-1	-0.73	-2	-0.84
22*	Leaders can be easily created (F)	-3	-1.37	-4	-2.07
23*	The nature of leaders and leadership needs to be (F)	1	0.81	2	1.20
24*	Leaders emerge as a result of the environment (I)	0	0.10	2	-0.84
25*	Leadership demands continual adaptability (F)	2	1.20	4	1.83
26*	Being a leader first requires that you have "power" (I)	-4	-2.26	-4	-1.44
27*	We each decide, individually, who can and (F)	1	0.24	0	-0.04
29*	As human beings, we collectively (F)	0	0.00	-1	-0.56
30*	Leadership is mutually exclusive; one person (I)	-2	-1.22	-1	-0.60
31*	Leadership is for the "gifted" (I)	-1	-0.16	-1	-0.36
32*	Leaders/leadership emerge from social (F)	1	0.24	1	0.32
33*	Leaders emerge based on context and the needs (F)	1	0.51	1	0.32
35*	In a given situation or context, leadership (F)	0	-0.08	1	0.32
37*	Leaders/leadership are socially constructed (F)	0	0.00	0	0.00
38*	Leaders emerge based on multiple, distinct (I)	-1	-0.31	-1	-0.64
39*	Leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (F)	-2	-1.20	-2	-0.96
40*	Leadership involves identifying the "niche" (I)	1	0.40	0	0.04
41*	We decide collectively (F)	-1	-0.15	0	0.04
42*	Leadership is primarily about relationships (F)	3	1.27	3	1.55

Note: all listed statements are non-significant at $P > .01$, and those flagged with an * are also non-significant at $P > .05$. Flexible (F) = 15 statements, Inflexible (I) = 13 statements.

¹¹ Statements are truncated. Please see Appendix C – *Q-Set Statements* for details.

These statements show which understandings about leaders and leadership were in least contention among the study group participants, and thus were the most agreed or disagreed with statements that resulted from Q-Sort #2 (post focus group).

At the outset of this study, each Q-Statement was classified by the researcher as exemplifying either a “flexible” or an “inflexible” understanding of leaders and leadership (all 42 statements have been classified in this manner, see Appendix C, *Q-Set Statements* for further details). In Q-Sort #2, there were more flexible consensus statements chosen by study participants than there were inflexible consensus statements. Thus, the general understanding of leaders and leadership expressed by participants after Q-Sort #2 is classified as flexible. In other words, the participants in this study expressed an understanding of leaders and leadership that was based more upon relativist, subjective, flat or changeable views versus essentialist, objective, hierarchical or unchangeable views. Some examples are as follows; Statement 22, “leaders can be easily created” was a consensus statement, as was Statement 32, “leaders and leadership emerge from our social interactions” (in other words, interacting with others creates people who we think are leaders), and Statement 41, “we decide collectively (in other words through groups and/or the larger society) who can and who cannot be a leader”. Each of these statements clearly expresses subjective understandings about leaders and leadership that are flexible (i.e., if leaders can be easily created, and if they emerge as a result of social interactions and collective decision making, they are flexible in nature) and thus supportive of the understanding of leaders as pliable and socially created constructions.

As shown in Table 2, out of the 13 inflexible consensus statements that resulted from this second Q-Sort exercise, 10 statements showed dramatic differences (in the context of their categorization as consensus statements, recall that it is the fact that there was a smaller amount of difference in their rankings by the study participants that allows their classification as consensus statements). 3 statements did not show dramatic differences; Statement 26, “being a leader first requires that you have some amount of power over others”, Statement 31, “leadership is for the gifted (in other words, those who have some special abilities)” and Statement 38 “leaders emerge based on multiple, distinct and identifiable factors that cannot be controlled”, were ranked identically (as -4, -1, and -1 respectively) in both factor one and factor two. These statements were also most disagreed with or agreed with, as well. Thus, a majority of the consensus statements that can be classified as inflexible evidenced some degree of difference in ranking between the two factors (although, in most cases, the differences were slight, see Table 2, *Q-Sort #2 Consensus Statements* for additional details). For example, Statement 2, “leaders are born and not made”, which expresses inflexible notions about leaders and leadership, was ranked as a 0 (neutral) in factor one, and a -1 in factor two (slight disagreement), a difference of only one position. Conversely, Statement 15, “leadership is something available to a select few people” was ranked a -1 in factor one, and a -3 in factor two, a much more dramatic difference (-1 indicating slight disagreement, while -3 indicates a high level of disagreement).

Out of the 28 consensus statements that resulted from this second Q-Sort, 13 were identified as exhibiting “inflexible” understandings of leaders and leadership. It cannot be

said then that understandings about leaders and leadership were highly flexible. Unexpectedly, (the researcher did not hypothesize that post-focus group understandings would be as flexible as the second Q-Sort has shown them to be, at least among this particular group of participants) the statements that emerged as the most dramatic examples of “flexible” leadership understandings exhibited moderate to high levels of agreement in both factors. For example, Statement 3, “people can learn to be leaders”, and Statement 25, “leadership demands continual adaptability”, were ranked as either a 4 (most agree), or 2 (moderate agreement), and were the only statements in the second Q-Sort to be ranked as such (no other statements were ranked as 4 in either factor, though 6 were ranked as 2 in both factors combined). The presence of these two “extreme” statements, were seen as embodying highly flexible levels of understanding about leaders and leadership, reinforced the over-all trend in the participant’s understanding about leaders and leadership after the second Q-Sort: understandings are more flexible.

It is important to note, however, that there are also consensus statements that are classified as “inflexible” in nature (13 out of the 28 total consensus statements were classified as such), which means that we cannot say with any amount of definitiveness that post-focus group understandings are wholly flexible, but rather we must, as was the case after the initial Q-Sort exercise, conclude that the results are mixed, but can generally be described as flexible. For example, Statement 6, “leadership is situation and context specific; not everyone can lead in every situation”, which is classified as inflexible (any statements that adhere to extremes can be said to exhibit characteristics of inflexibility), was agreed with (it was ranked a 2 and 3 in factors one and two

respectively, indicating a moderate level of agreement). Additionally, Statement 24, “leaders emerge as a result of the environment (that is, people become leaders based on the context, group or organization they are a part of), which is classified as inflexible, received a ranking of 0 on factor one and 2 on factor two, indicating neutral feelings or moderate agreement.

Since a majority of the consensus statements from Q-Sort #2 are classified as “flexible”, and since the consensus statements that exhibit the most agreement among participants are classified as flexible, it can be said that participants post focus group understandings about leadership are also mixed, but lean towards flexibility.

Q-Sort Results Comparison

After data was obtained from both Q-Sort exercises for each of the five study participants, a comparison of the data was made in an attempt to answer the specific two-part question that grounded this study: (1) to what extent and (2) in what way(s) are individual graduate business and public administration student’s perceptions of leaders and leadership altered by the intentional use of the metaphor “leader as social construction” in focused group discussions? Viewing the focus group-discussion as the “intervention” (or independent variable) as mentioned previously, a comparison of the pre and post Q-Sort exercise data showed a common result; study participants’ understandings about leaders and leadership were mixed. This result mirrored and reinforced the “mixed understanding” finding that emerged after analysis of the data from both the first and second Q-Sort exercises was completed.

Q-Sort #1 (pre intervention) has shown that participant's understandings of leaders and leadership were more inflexible than flexible, though the presence of 8 consensus statements that could be classified as flexible (out of 18 total consensus statements) means that participants did not have exclusively flexible understandings about leadership. The expectation at the outset of this study was that participant's initial understandings about leadership would be significantly less flexible than the data have shown them to actually be, though the actual results of the initial Q-Sort exercise are supportive of the general hypothesis that understandings would be inflexible at the outset of the study.

Q-Sort #2 (post-focus group) has shown that participants' understandings of leaders and leadership were more flexible than inflexible, though, like in the initial Q-Sort, the significant presence of opposing statements does not allow this study to claim that post-focus group understandings of leaders and leadership are clearly flexible in nature. In this case, there were 13 consensus statements identified as inflexible (out of a total of 28 consensus statements), which, again, means that understandings were mixed. The expectation at the outset of this study was that participant's understandings post-focus group discussion would be at least moderately flexible, instead of just slightly so as these results indicate. Again, however, the result of the second Q-Sort is supportive of the general hypothesis that understandings would be flexible after the discussion of the "leader as social construction" metaphor had taken place.

There were additional contrasts between Q-Sort #1 and Q-Sort #2 as well. For example, the initial Q-Sort contained similarly ranked statements, though all five of them

were ranked as “neutral” (or “0” on the score sheet), and four of these were classified as flexible consensus statements (see Table 1 for additional details about this finding). This data bolsters the “inflexible understandings” findings of the initial Q-Sort. If participant’s held neutral views about statements classified as flexible (recall that 8 of the 18 consensus statements were classified as flexible, and half of these received neutral rankings), the influence these statements wield in the findings is diminished. Thus, participant’s not only similarly ranked statements that are classified as flexible, but as “neutral” as well, which is evidence that study participants may have held flexible understandings of leaders and leadership that were waiting to emerge, and/or which were able to be magnified through the focused group discussion which followed the initial Q-Sort exercise.

An additional difference is seen in the data from Q-Sort #2. Here, 8 statements were ranked similarly, though only once was a statement ranked similarly as “neutral”; the other statements were either similarly agreed with, or similarly disagreed with. Of special note is Statement 42, “leadership is primarily about relationships”, which was ranked similarly on both factors at level three, indicating a high level of agreement. This statement is clearly social in nature, and supportive of the “flexible understanding” general results seen in the second Q-Sort. Conversely, however, other flexible statements were disagreed with in a similar way. For example, Statement 39, “leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (in other words leadership is a mystery), was ranked similarly at a -2 level, indicating a moderate level of disagreement. In fact, out of the eight similarly ranked statements in Q-Sort #2, five were classified as flexible and three inflexible, and

out of the five flexible statements, 3 were agreed with (including Statement 42 discussed earlier), and two disagreed with (including Statement 39 discussed above). This finding supports the mixed understandings result that has been evidenced, with results demonstrating a slight bend towards flexible understandings of leadership after Q-Sort #2.

Written Interview Findings

Supplementing the Q-Sort data with written interviews added a lot of depth to the Q-Sort results, as well as contributed to the continuation of the valuation of subjectivity in this study (the perspective of the researcher, as described in earlier chapters of this dissertation, is that subjectivity is inescapable, in particular when human perceptions and understandings are being examined).

After the second Q-Sort ranking exercise was complete, each of the five participants was required to complete a “written interview” instrument. Appendix G – *Post Q-Sort Written Interview Instrument* shows the written interview schema, including the questions that each participant responded to. The questions were direct; each was asked to elaborate upon their most “extreme” rankings (i.e., the two statements that they most disagreed with and most agreed with in each of the two Q-Sort ranking exercises). Additionally, the participants were asked to judge (for themselves) whether their rankings changed “significantly” between the first two Q-Sort exercises (again, the researcher left judgments of significance up to the study participants since subjectivity is valued), and then to indicate why they think any ranking changes did or did not occur.

The following material is a transcription of the participant's hand-written responses to each interview question. First, the Q-Sort statements ranked as "most agree" from the initial and post Q-Sort exercises are presented, followed by the statements ranked as "most disagree" (this allows for easy comparison between the first and second Q-Sorts). After each pair of statements, the participant's written explanation is provided (called "comments"); each person was asked why they thought they most agreed/disagreed with the two statements that they selected in the ranking exercise. Next, the participant comparison of the Q-sorts is shown, and it is in this section that each participant was asked to judge whether their understandings about leaders and leadership had changed between Q-Sort exercises, and to briefly discuss why they felt the changes did or did not occur. Each participant's section concludes with an analysis of that participant's specific data (called "analysis"), which created a profile for each participant. This section of the dissertation concludes with a written interview data summary (Table 3) that provides an easy synopsis of the written interview data, and a discussion of how the data obtained ultimately contributed to answering the two-part question posed at the outset of this study.

Participant Selections and Explanations of Q-Sort Rankings

Rankings for Participant #1¹²

Q-Sort 1, Most Agree

Statement 4 – Leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a "special something" that makes them great.

¹² Transcribed comments in Q-Sort descriptions are shown in italics to differentiate between directly quoted material and the dissertation author's own commentary.

Statement 6 – Leadership is situation and context specific; not everyone can lead in every situation.

Comments: *In my first leadership position, I had no training . . . I had a natural knack [for] leading people and programs. While I don't classify myself as "great", I did have an innate sense of direction when leading. Situations and contexts vary, requiring various people to lead at various times. I have seen this play-out over and over. Someone who excels, generally, in leadership and makes consistent good decisions may not be needed in all situations.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Agree

Statement 4 – Leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a “special something” that makes them great.

Statement 21 – Being a leader requires training and education.

Comments: *Again, from question #2, I have personified the “special something” (i.e. – innate ability, when undertaking my first leadership role with no training and often little direction from upper management). While leadership is part genetic, training plays an important role as well. In only my first quarter at SU [Seattle University] I am already applying lessons learned to my current situation. People wouldn't waste time and resources with training and education if it was not helpful.*

Q-Sort 1 Most Disagree

Statement 1 – Everyone is a leader.

Statement 11 – Leadership is a power relationship.

Comments: *While perhaps everyone has the potential ability to lead, though some never avail themselves. . . so it may be inaccurate to state that “everyone is a leader”. Leadership is often a power relationship, however, it does not have to be. Symbolic leadership, in particular, does not depend on the exercise of power.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Disagree

Statement 1 – Everyone is a leader.

Statement 26 – Being a leader first requires that you have “power” over other people.

Comments: *Again, similar to question #1...I definitely disagree that everyone avails themselves of opportunities to lead. Also, while leadership often utilizes power, leadership does not require power as a condition of leading.*

Comparison: *It was interesting that one statement in each category remained the same between Q-Sort #1 and 2, and one statement changed in each category. Even with the change, the change was very slight. In fact, the statements were almost identical but worded slightly differently. I think the statements remained similar because they reflect my fairly strong opinions on both sides of the question.*

Analysis: This participant had understandings about leadership that can be classified as inflexible both before and after the focused group discussion. The statements that they chose as “most agree” (statements 4, 6, and 21) are all classified as inflexible (see Appendix C – *Q-Set Statements* for additional details). However, the statements with which he/she most disagreed (Statements 1, 11 and 26), are also primarily inflexible, with the exception of Statement 1, “everyone is a leader”, which is classified as flexible (and

with which they disagreed). His/her written comments indicate that they definitely felt that leadership can be learned, which is viewed as a somewhat flexible understanding, in particular given that he/she selected Statement 4, “leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a ‘special something’ that makes them great” twice. He/she also indicated that leadership requires training and education (and they did this in the post-focus group Q-Sort exercise), which is an inflexible understanding. He/she also indicated, however, that leadership may have a genetic basis (an inflexible understanding because of its exclusivity), stating “while leadership is part genetic, training plays an important role as well”. He/she also wrote that “in my first leadership position, I had no training . . . I had a natural knack [for] leading people and programs”, which, again, implies exclusivity and inflexibility (i.e., what happens when people don’t have such a knack)?

Examining his/her “most disagree” rankings, participant one chose Statement 4, “leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a ‘special something’ that makes them great” twice, both during the initial Q-Sort as well as in the post-focus group discussion Q-Sort exercise. However, he/she also disagreed with Statement 11, “leadership is a power relationship” and Statement 26, “being a leader first requires that you have some amount of power over others”, so clearly they did not think power has much, if anything, to do with leadership, which means they are disagreeing with inflexible understandings about leadership. This participant stated, “also, while leadership often utilizes power, leadership does not require power as a condition of leading”, and “symbolic leadership, in particular, does not depend on the exercise of

power”. Thus, at least along the inflexible dimension of “power”, Participant #1 clearly disagreed. Additionally, this participant stated that, “while perhaps everyone has the potential ability to lead, though some never avail themselves . . . so it may be inaccurate to state that ‘everyone is a leader’”. This indicates that this participant feels that while everyone may be capable of exercising leadership, not everyone chooses to do so, and thus not everyone is a leader (again, inflexible understandings are displayed; I would assert that everyone exercises leadership at some level and to some degree at some point in their lives, whether they consciously chose to do so or not). However, it should be noted that understanding leadership as something that everyone is capable of exercising would be considered a flexible understanding, and it is something this participant indicated that they thought was true. It should also be noted that this participant may have misunderstood the researcher’s subjective interpretation of the statement “everyone is a leader”, since they attached a “scale” to the statement; they read it at the macro level only, while the researcher meant leadership at all levels.

Participant #1 felt that it was “interesting that one statement in each category remained the same between Q-Sort #1 and #2, and one statement changed in each category”, and indicated that they felt that “even with the change, the change was very slight”. They felt that “the statements remained similar because they reflect my fairly strong opinions on both sides of the question”, and their written comments do highlight some strong pre-existing understandings about leaders and leadership which were not easily altered.

Rankings for Participant #2

Q-Sort 1 Most Agree

Statement 42 – Leadership is primarily about relationships.

Statement 25 – Leadership demands continual adaptability.

Comments: *Leadership is about being able to change and meet people at the level they are at. A good leader is able to assess a situation, adjust their tactics and move people forward.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Agree

Statement 42 – Leadership is primarily about relationships.

Statement 25 – Leadership demands continual adaptability.

Comments: *Good leaders also know how to manage people and their relationships. This helps them gain credibility and the adaptability of their team.*

Q-Sort 1 Most Disagree

Statement 14 – Leadership is a combination of the genetic and the learned.

Statement 39 – Leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (in other words, leadership is a mystery).

Comments: *Leadership is not a mystery nor is it a factor of being born to the right parents. Leadership emerges in all places, not just to people born into mysterious/lucky circumstances. Formal leadership (i.e. presidents, kings, etc) [is] more inherently a genetic lucky break for those leaders; everyday leadership does not play into genetics and mystery as much.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Disagree

Statement 10 – Leadership means that you “induce compliance” among followers in some way.

Statement 2 – Leaders are born and not made.

Comments: *Leadership has less to do with genetics and being born [to the correct family, etc] than what a person does with the opportunities presented [to] them. A good leader does not “induce” people to comply with their wishes – rather they lead and manage people well.*

Comparison: *No, answers did not change significantly. The top answers stayed in the top half and vice versa. [NOTE – answers for “most disagree” changed completely]. I do not believe they changed significantly because these leadership values also touch upon a person’s core values. Core values may shift over time but most often not significantly.*

Analysis: This participant demonstrated understandings about leadership that can be classified as flexible both before and after the focused group discussion. However, post Q-Sort data suggest higher flexible understandings about leadership than the participant expressed in Q-Sort #1. The statements that they chose as “most agree” (Statements 42 and 25 on both Q-sorts) are both classified as flexible (see Appendix C – *Q-Set Statements* for additional details). However, the statements with which they most disagreed (Statements 14, 39, 10, and 2), were split, with 2 classified as inflexible (Statements 10 and 2), and two (Statements 14 and 39) classified as flexible. While this participant’s “most agreed” with statements remained the same after both Q-Sort ranking

exercises (though it cannot be ignored that they may have simply remembered how they answered on the first Q-Sort when doing the second, the embrace of subjectivity in this study renders this concern moot), it should be noted that both of the statements with which they most disagreed in the initial Q-Sort are classified as “flexible”, while in the second Q-Sort they most disagreed with statements classified as inflexible. This indicates that their perceptions trend towards valuing flexible notions of leadership over those classified as inflexible (since they disagreed with flexible statements initially, and then disagreed with inflexible statements after the focused group discussion had taken place).

This participant’s written comments indicated that they definitely felt that leadership is about relationships (which could be viewed as a somewhat flexible understanding since it is social in nature), in particular given that they selected Statement 42, “leadership is about relationships” twice (indicating both times that it was an understanding about leadership that they most agreed with). This participant also indicated that leadership demands continual adaptability, and they held this view in both the pre and post-focus group Q-Sort exercises; they indicated in Q-Sort #1 that “a good leader is able to assess a situation, adjust their tactics and move people forward”, a flexible understanding. This participant also indicated that they do not understand leadership to have a genetic basis (genetic causality would be a highly inflexible understanding because of its exclusivity and essentialist nature), stating “leadership has less to do with genetics and being born [into the right family, circumstances, etc] than what a person does with the opportunities presented to them”, and “leadership is not a mystery nor is it a factor of being born to the right parents”. These statements, again,

imply disagreement with understandings about leadership that are classified as exclusive and inflexible.

Examining the “most disagree” rankings more closely, participant two chose completely different statements during each Q-Sort administration (unlike the duplication of the statements with which they most agreed). As indicated previously, Statement 14, “Leadership is a combination of the genetic and the learned” (Q-Sort #1), and Statement 2, “Leaders are born and not made”, clearly shows that this participant does not feel leadership has a genetic basis. However, the participant also disagreed with Statement number 39, “Leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (in other words, leadership is a mystery)” in Q-Sort #1 and Statement 10, “Leadership means that you ‘induce compliance’ among followers in some way” in Q-Sort #2. Thus, Participant #2 does not think power has much to do with leadership, and thinks that what makes a leader a leader can be identified and, perhaps, even created. This participant stated, “a good leader does not ‘induce’ people to comply with their wishes, rather they lead and manage people well”. Thus, at least along the inflexible dimensions of “power” and “mystery”, Participant #2 highly disagrees. Additionally, this participant stated that, “leadership emerges in all places, not just to people born into mysterious/lucky circumstances”. This indicates that this participant feels that everyone may be capable of exercising leadership (a very flexible understanding).

Participant #2 indicated, when referring to the fact that the statements with which he/she “most agreed” did not change between the pre and post Q-Sort exercises, that “I do not believe they [my understandings] changed significantly because . . . leadership

values also touch upon a person's core values. Core values may shift over time but most often not significantly". Additionally, even though the statements with which the participant "most disagreed" in both Q-Sort exercises changed completely from one administration to the other, the general undertone of the disagreed with statements was similar. For example, Statement 14, "Leadership is a combination of the genetic and the learned" could be said to be similar to Statement 2, "Leaders are born and not made"; the participant's disagreement with these statements downplays the role of genetics, thus downplaying notions of inflexibility.

Rankings for Participant #3

Q-Sort 1 Most Agree

Statement 28 – Leadership requires charisma.

Statement 7 – It takes talent to be a leader.

Comments: *The natural leader doesn't need to learn and be trained. The person will have the natural talent to be one.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Agree

Statement 7 – It takes talent to be a leader.

Statement 28 – Leadership requires charisma.

Comments: *I picked the same statements on the first and second Q-Sort and I think it has to do with my strong belief that leadership is a natural talent for a given situation.*

Q-Sort 1 Most Disagree

Statement 21 – Being a leader requires training and education.

Statement 17 – Leadership requires a high level of experience.

Comments: *I feel like a leader is born, not created. There are some people who people consider to be leaders even when they don't demand it. There is limited need for them to have experience and training.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Disagree

Statement 22 – Leaders can be easily created.

Statement 26 – Being a leader first requires that you have “power” over other people.

Comments: *Leaders can't be easily created since in most situations if a person doesn't show leadership qualities for that environment it is unlikely that he/she can be made [into] one.*

Comparison: *Yes, I think it happened because the statements are very similar and can apply differently in different situations. For instance, if someone shows leadership in [an] engineering environment, the same person may not show leadership qualities at home. My answers may have depended on my mind-set today and how I based by selection.*

Analysis: This participant has understandings about leadership that can be classified as inflexible before the focused group discussion, and slightly more flexible afterwards. The statements that the participant selected to “most agree” with (Statements 7 and 28) are both classified as inflexible (see Appendix C – *Q-Set Statements* for additional details), and the participant selected them both before and after the focused group discussion. However, the statements with which the participant most disagreed

(Statements 21, 17, 22 and 26), are also primarily inflexible, with the exception of Statement 22, “leaders can be easily created”, which is classified as flexible (and with which they disagreed). Thus, the disagreement with statements that are primarily classified as inflexible indicates that their understandings may have become slightly more flexible after the focused group discussion.

The participant’s written comments indicate that he/she definitely felt that leadership does not require any formal training, but that “the person will have the natural talent to be one” (a very inflexible understanding). Also, the participant disagreed with understandings that held that leadership could be learned (which is classified as a flexible understanding). In particular, given that he/she selected Statement 28, “Leadership requires charisma” and Statement 7, “It takes talent to be a leader” twice, this participant is expressing an understanding of leadership that is anchored in inflexibility (Statement 28, “Leadership requires charisma” is fairly absolute, and while this participant denies the value of training, they do agree that leadership requires “talent”). The participant also indicated that he/she realized that he/she chose to agree with the same statements both pre and post focus group, and explained this by stating, “it has to do with my strong belief that leadership is a natural talent [in] a given situation”.

Examining the “most disagree” rankings, Participant #3 chose completely different statements in each Q-Sort ranking exercise. To some extent, the participant’s disagreement with three statements classified as inflexible (out of the 4 total statements that they most disagreed with from the two Q-Sort exercises) seems at odds with the statements he/she most agreed with (which were all classified as inflexible). This

indicates that he/she may have some mixed feelings on the subject, and thus the disagreement with primarily inflexible statements indicates they may have some level of understanding about leadership that is flexible. This mixed finding is not inconsistent with other participants' understandings. This participant chose to disagree with Statement 21, "Being a leader requires training and education", and Statement 17, "Leadership requires a high level of experience". These selections reinforced the written comments about leadership not requiring training (they indicated "I feel a leader is born and not created"), and his/her feeling, as reflected in the statements he/she agreed with, that leadership requires charisma and talent. This participant also disagreed with Statement 22, "Leaders can be easily created", and indicated that "Leaders can't be easily created since in most situations if a person doesn't show leadership qualities for that environment it is unlikely that he/she can be made [into] one". Like Participant #1, Participant #3 also disagreed with Statement 26, "Being a leader first requires that you have 'power' over other people", demonstrating that power dimensions of leadership are not thought to be relevant.

Participant #3 felt that the selection of identical "most agree" statements in both Q-Sort exercises happened "because the statements were very similar and could apply differently in different situations", and indicated that they felt that context was important when they stated ". . . if someone shows leadership in [an] engineering environment, the same person may not show leadership qualities at home". At the same time, this participant also acknowledged the importance of subjectivity to leadership by concluding

the written interview with the following statement, “My answers may have depended on my mind-set today”, which shows his/her embrace (conscious or not) of subjectivity.

Rankings for Participant #4

Q-Sort 1 Most Agree

Statement 4 – Leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a “special something” that makes them great.

Statement 24 – Leaders emerge as a result of the environment (that is, people become leaders based on the context, group, or organization they are a part of).

Comments: *Not all leaders emerged just as a result of years of experiences. In specific situations, leaders are created because they have been prepared. They are most likely to be clever, ambitious, and persistent. They have courage and determination to achieve certain goals.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Agree

Statement 28 – Leadership requires charisma.

Statement 33 – Leaders emerge based on context and the needs of the group or the organization.

Comments: *In my opinion, being a leader requires that you have the ability to acquire power. Power is not given to anybody for nothing.*

Q-Sort 1 Most Disagree

Statement 13 – Leadership is strictly an effect of followership (and vice versa); one naturally produces the other.

Statement 30 – Leadership is mutually exclusive; one person leading excludes others from taking a leadership role.

Comments: *[I disagreed] because these two statements are too narrow to define the relationship. Real successful leadership should be based on mutual respect, trustful reliance and cooperation.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Disagree

Statement 13 – Leadership is strictly an effect of followership (and vice versa); one naturally produces the other.

Statement 26 – Being a leader first requires that you have “power” over other people.

NOTE [written unintelligible statement]: Not everyone can see far.

Comparison: *No. Personally, I think the successful leadership role shall first respect those people under [their leadership]. Any self-centered, inconsiderate leaders will not achieve long-term goals.*

Analysis: This participant has understandings about leadership that can be classified as mixed flexible/inflexible both before and after the focused group discussion; however, pre and post focus group Q-Sort results categorized as “most agree” lean towards inflexible understandings about leadership. The statements that the participant chose as “most agree” (Statements 4, 24, 28 and 33) are primarily classified as inflexible (see Appendix C – *Q-Set Statements* for additional details), with only Statement 33, “Leaders emerge based on context and the needs of the group” being classified as flexible. However, the statements with which the participant most disagreed (Statements

13, 30 and 26, with Statement 13, “Leadership is strictly an effect of followership (and vice versa); one naturally produces the other ” (chosen twice), are primarily inflexible, with the exception of Statement 13 as indicated above, which is classified as flexible (and with which the participant disagreed).

The written comments indicate that the participant felt that leadership requires certain traits (which could be viewed as a somewhat inflexible understanding), in particular given that the participant selected Statement 4, “leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a ‘special something’ that makes them great”, and stated “In specific situations, leaders are created because they have been prepared. They are most likely to be clever, ambitious and persistent” and “They have courage and determination to achieve certain goals”. The participant also indicated that leadership requires charisma (the participant “most agreed” with Statement 28, “Leadership requires charisma”) and power, and stated “In my opinion, being a leader requires that you have the ability to acquire power”. However, the participant also seems to feel that leadership may have a genetic basis (a highly inflexible understanding because of its exclusivity), when he/she stated, “While leadership is part genetic, training plays an important role as well.” The participant also writes “In my first leadership position, I had no training . . . I had a natural knack [for] leading people and programs”, which, again, implies exclusivity and, thus, inflexibility.

Examining the “most disagree” rankings, Participant #4 chose Statement 13, “Leadership is strictly an effect of followership (and vice versa); one naturally produces the other” twice, both during the initial Q-Sort as well as in the post-focus group

discussion Q-Sort exercise. This statement is classified as inflexible and Participant #4 “most disagreed” with it twice. However, he/she also disagreed with Statement 30, “leadership is mutually exclusive; one person leading excludes others from taking a leadership role” and Statement 26, “being a leader first requires that you have some amount of power over other people”. This is a complete contradiction of the written comments after Q-Sort #2, where the participant indicated that “. . . being a leader requires that you have the ability to acquire power”. Unfortunately, this participant’s written comments were not understandable (and almost non-existent) in this part of the written interview, so I am unable to clarify this contradiction. This finding does, however, support the classification of this participant’s understanding about leaders and leadership as mixed. Again, this matches the findings of the other participants in this study.

Participant #4 felt that the answers did not change drastically between the first and second Q-Sort exercises, commenting, “personally, I think the successful leadership role shall first respect those people under [their leadership]” and “any self-centered, inconsiderate leaders will not achieve long-term goals”. These comments seem to indicate this participant’s belief in some level of hierarchy (an inflexible understanding), a clearly delineated leader-follower dichotomy, as well as, once again, the importance of traits or actions in defining what is or is not considered leadership (again, these are all inflexible understandings). Thus, classifying this participant as having primarily inflexible understandings, with slight leanings towards flexibility (given that they went from most agreeing with two inflexible statements, numbers 4 and 24, to most agreeing

with one inflexible and one flexible statement, numbers 28 and 33, indicates slight change). They disagreed with one flexible and one inflexible statement on each Q-Sort exercise, which is a mixed result, and reinforces such a classification.

Rankings for Participant #5

Q-Sort 1 Most Agree

Statement 25 – Leadership demands continual adaptability.

Statement 42 – Leadership is primarily about relationships.

Comments: *Leadership is about interpersonal relationships. As leadership is a social function, it requires great adaptability in order to invoke great results from differing people and personalities.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Agree

Statement 4 – Leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a “special something” that makes them great.

Statement 42 – Leadership is primarily about relationships.

Comments: *Leadership is an interpersonal skill-set, or about motivating people. These skills can be developed through practice, though some have an innate predisposition to leadership.*

Q-Sort 1 Most Disagree

Statement 39 – Leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (in other words, leadership is a mystery).

Statement 26 – Being a leader first requires that you have “power” over other people.

Comments: *These two statements are representative (to me) [subjectivity] of “old school” authoritarian leadership – a model which is no longer in favor for producing long-term satisfactory results.*

Q-Sort 2 Most Disagree

Statement 26 – Being a leader first requires that you have “power” over other people.

Statement 16 – Leadership involves a structured hierarchy (for example, like an organizational chart within your company).

Comments: *Again, the emphasis is on authoritarian or command and control leadership. This model is not flexible enough for modern, information driven organizations.*

Comparison: *Not a huge degree of change. Some slight re-ordering due to differing interpretations of the statements and depth of evaluation. My perception of leadership is relatively constant, as is the list of skills and traits that make up that skill.*

Analysis: Participant #5 has understandings about leadership that can be classified as flexible both before and after the focused group discussion. The statements that the participant chose as “most agree” (statements 25, 42, and 4) are primarily classified as flexible (see Appendix C – *Q-Set Statements* for additional details), with the exception of Statement 4, “leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a “special something” that makes them great. The statements with which they most disagreed (Statements 39, 26 and 16), are primarily inflexible, with the exception of Statement 39, “Leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (i.e. – leadership is a

mystery)”, which is classified as flexible (and with which they disagreed). Additionally, the participant “most agreed with” Statement 42, “leadership is primarily about relationships” on both Q-Sort exercises (pre and post), and they most disagreed with Statement 26, “being a leader first requires that you have ‘power’ over other people” on both Q-Sort exercises. Thus, the participant chose to agree twice with a statement classified as flexible and chose to disagree twice with a statement classified as inflexible; these selections reinforce the finding that Participant #5 has, in general, understandings about leadership that are flexible in nature. This participant may have general understandings about leadership that are flexible in nature, but given that he/she selected Statement 4, “leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a ‘special something’ that makes them great” on Q-Sort #2 (post focus group), indicates that the participant’s understandings may be slightly mixed (i.e., there is room for some inflexible understandings in the perceptions about leaders and leadership). If it takes a “special something” to make a great leader, this understanding excludes all those people who do not possess that “special something (quality or trait).

The written comments indicated that the participant felt that leadership is about relationship (which can be viewed as a flexible and social understanding), in particular given that the participant selected Statement 42, “leadership is primarily about relationships” twice. The participant also stated, “leadership is about relationships. As leadership is a social function, it requires great adaptability in order to invoke great results from differing people and personalities” in the written comments. Participant #5 also indicated that leadership involves an “interpersonal skill-set” (and did this in the

post-focus group Q-Sort exercise), indicating “these skills can be developed through practice, though some have an innate predisposition to leadership”. This understanding is characterized as inflexible. This matches the “most agree” ranking of Statement 4, “leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a ‘special something’ that makes them great”, which is also classified as inflexible, in the second Q-Sort exercise. The participant also indicated that leadership and power are not related, given the “most disagree” ranking of Statement 26, “being a leader first requires that you have some amount of power over others” (a highly inflexible understanding because of its exclusivity), twice (both pre and post focus group). The participant stated, “authoritarian leadership . . . [is] a model which is no longer in favor for producing long-term satisfactory results”, and “this model is not flexible enough for modern, information driven organizations”.

Participant #5 was not surprised by the lack of change in the pre and post focus group results, indicating that “my perceptions of leadership [are] relatively constant, as is the list of skills and traits that make up that skill”. This assessment of the participant’s own understanding agrees with the earlier conclusion that, while this participant’s general understandings about leadership were characterized as flexible, they were, to a small degree, actually mixed.

Written Interview Findings Summary

The written interview data add to the results of the Q-Sort exercises by providing increased data depth, allowed this study to further explore the subjective viewpoints of each participant, which was stated at the outset as an important objective of this study.

Since lived leadership realities are constructed from individual (and, by default, from collective) perceptions, and since perceptions are the product of subjective understandings (influenced and created through language), exploring the subjective viewpoints of the study's participants was crucial to identifying how socially constructed entities like leaders and leadership can be altered (created, enhanced, mitigated or destroyed) using language, in particular metaphor and story. Table 3 below provides a summary of findings from the written interviews that were conducted after the second Q-Sort exercise (post focus group discussion). The first column indicates the participant number (identifier), the second column indicates the final over-all classification of the participant (flexible, inflexible or mixed leadership understandings), and the third column indicates the guiding rationale for the classification that was chosen (drawn from the previous section). The fourth column indicates whether the participants' overall classifications support the theory that focused group discussion around the "leader as social construction" metaphor influenced the participant's leadership understandings (i.e., alters them in some way).

Table 3 - Written Interview Findings Summary

Participant #	Final Overall Classification (F=Flexible, I = Inflexible, I/F or F/I = mixed)	Guiding Rationale for Classification (drawn from written interview findings)	Theory Supported? (Y=Yes/N=No)
1	I	All “most agree” statements classified as “inflexible” (both pre and post). Feeling that leadership requires training and a “special something”, and may have at least a partly genetic basis. High level of disagreement with statement 1, “everyone is a leader”.	N
2	F	Post Q-Sort data indicate higher degree of flexibility than pre-Q-sort data. All statements chosen as “most agree” classified as flexible. They indicated that leadership is about relationships, and that it demands continual adaptability; they did not feel genetics plays a large role. They stated that “leadership emerges in all places.”	Y
3	I/F	Statements chosen as “most agree” all classified as “inflexible” both pre and post focus group, but statements chosen as “most disagree” are also primarily inflexible. They indicated that leadership requires some level of “natural talent” and/or charisma. Participant acknowledges subjectivity in understanding, and indicated that their answers “may have depended on their mind-set today”.	Y
4	I/F	Pre and post focus group Q-Sort results lean towards inflexible understandings. “Most Agree” and “Most Disagree” statements truly mixed (I/F). Comments indicate belief in leadership traits and charisma, but several “most disagreed” with statements also classified as “inflexible”. Post Q-Sort “most agree” statements became more flexible.	Y
5	F	Statements chosen as “most agree” both pre and post are primarily classified as flexible, and statements with which they “most disagreed” are primarily classified as “inflexible”. They chose to agree twice with a statement classified as flexible, and to disagree twice with a statement classified as inflexible. Written comments stress importance of relationships (social understandings).	Y

*Focus Group Findings*¹³

The focus group discussions (which took place during session one, and after the formal presentation about social constructionism and leadership) were audio-recorded in an effort to add another layer of depth to the Q-Sort findings and the written interview data; they have proven to reflect the other study results in that they revealed leadership understandings that can best be classified as “mixed” when it comes to notions of flexibility, inflexibility and leadership. As this was a tertiary data source (i.e., the focus group discussions were not meant to generate usable data per se, only to serve as the “intervention” phase of this study) recorded data is minimal, and will not be explored in depth. However, the following statements (made by study participants) are useful supplemental material in that they add to the other data that was obtained and reinforce the “mixed understandings” conclusion. The following paraphrased statements were drawn from the recordings made, with direct quotes appearing in parenthesis.

1. Participant #5: I find myself “deeply opposed to social constructionism”. I tend towards absolutes, “though I realize that life is more complicated than that”. I acknowledge that life is social to some degree; “leadership is contextual, but not infinitely pliable”, and constructionism may be better used to examine things like disability.
2. Participant #4: I don’t like abstract concepts. Social constructionism combines definitions of leadership, which I think is great. Social constructionism is harder

¹³ Appendix D – *Focus Group Schema* describes part of the focus group process (the rest was emergent in that it occurred in group discussions, and thus cannot be planned for in advance or listed on any session plan) used in this study.

to understand than just plain discussions of leadership; “using one abstract concept to explain another is, for me, confusing” and does not make sense.

3. Participant #5: “Some abstract concepts can be useful when explaining things that would otherwise not be unexplainable” . . . like metaphors. Not everything lends itself to concrete descriptions, like art, and constructionism makes more sense there.
4. Participant#3: If we only rely on subjectivity nothing can be “definite” . . . what can be trusted?
5. Participant #5: Malleability is bounded by time; “changes don’t take place over night”, and they “don’t take place on a dime” . . . change tends to “be evolutionary and not revolutionary”.

The verbal comments that resulted from the discussions, as indicated earlier, reflect mixed feelings about social constructionism, in particular as it applies to leadership. Participants seemed open to the concept in some cases, but seemed to have a difficult time transitioning from explanations about the social construction of disability, for example, to the social construction of leaders and leadership. Some valid points were raised; constructing and reconstructing reality (by altering perceptions) does not happen “overnight” or “on a dime”, it is, in general, a process that unfolds over time.

Theoretically changes can happen quickly, but in practice constructing and/or reconstructing reality takes time, and can in no way be seen as an immediate solution to any leadership dilemma. The point has been, however, to encourage another leadership practice, and not to provide a set of answers.

The data indicate that this study's participants are, in fact, cognizant of the idea that life is not truly based on absolutes, yet they clearly display a need to adhere to some sort of structure and set of definitions. For example, the first quote made by Participant #5 started out very rigid and passionate; they stated that they find themselves "deeply opposed to social constructionism". Yet, within the next few moments, the participant immediately softens the representation of his/her understanding, by adding that, though he/she tend toward thinking in absolute terms, the participant "realizes that life is more complicated than that". Thus, at least in a general sense, the comments generated during the focused group discussions mimic the results seen via analysis of this study's primary data; understandings about the social nature of leadership are mixed, yet lean towards a classification of "flexible".

Summary

The two-part research question that guided this study was: (1) to what extent and (2) in what way(s) are individual graduate business and public administration students' perceptions of leaders and leadership (along a "flexible/inflexible" continuum) altered by the intentional use of the metaphor "leader as social construction" in focused group discussions? Part one, which addresses the extent to which individual graduate business and public administration students' perceptions of leaders and leadership were altered by the intentional use of the metaphor "leader as social construction" in focused group discussions is straightforward. Their perceptions were altered to a measurable degree; the data reflect that a majority of participants either started out with less flexible perceptions of leaders and leadership than they ended up with post focus-group, or that

they started out with somewhat flexible perceptions that became increasingly flexible after the social constructionist metaphor was discussed.

Part two, which addresses the ways in which graduate business and public administration students' perceptions of leaders and leadership were altered by the intentional use of the metaphor "leader as social construction" in focus group discussions has a two-part answer:

1. Participants' perceptions became slightly more flexible; after the second (post) Q-Sort exercise, the study data reflect more flexible understandings about leaders and leadership.
2. Participants' perceptions are still mixed; after the second Q-Sort exercise, the study data reflect sustained mixed understandings about leaders and leadership. While understandings became more flexible in general, they remained mixed post focus-group discussion (as Q-Sort #1 also showed them to be, though they were less flexible at that time).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As an aid to the reader, this final dissertation chapter restates the research problem and question, reviews the procedures and methodology that were used to investigate them, summarizes the findings of the study, and, lastly, discusses the implications of the study's results. The discussion of results is broken down into separate sections, and includes the author's interpretation of the findings, the theoretical implications of the study, the relationship of the current study to previous leadership research and literature, the implications for educators and policy that have emerged from the study, and the study's limitations and suggestions for future research work.

Restatement of the Problem

As outlined in Chapter 1 and throughout this paper, the dominant leadership paradigms of the last several decades have not been based upon understandings of leaders and leadership as pliable social constructions. Leadership has not been understood primarily as a fully subjective and socially-created reality, influenced by language and personal interactions, but as the result of various other more essentialist, trait-based and/or hierarchical paradigms. Chapter 2 established and then explored the linkage between social constructionism, metaphor and story-making, and viewed them as theoretically related and highly compatible in practice. Social constructionism thus served as the lens through which leadership has been understood in this research, while metaphor and story-making served as tools that could be used to influence individual leadership perceptions. Traditional leadership approaches and theory, seen both in real-world practice and within the leadership literature, tend to have taken more

individualistic (Western), essentialist or trait-based views, which limit their capacity to be of use in highly globalized and hyper-diverse contexts. While many of the more recent theories and practices are more collaborative and social in nature, they tend towards passivity (i.e., leadership emerges by default during group processes), and/or do not embrace leadership as being the result of both social interaction and discourse (language), but simply explain it as the result of either one or the other. Thus, leadership perceptions are too limited, and thereby unsuitable to the demands of postmodern societies.

The purpose of this study was to extend the research that utilizes a social constructionist epistemology in the study of leadership; we sought to discover if and how leadership perceptions could be altered by metaphorical story-making when it is intentionally used as a tool of interaction and discourse. As a social constructionist, I believe that the construct “leader”, as it applies to the individual, can be created, enhanced, mitigated or destroyed via interaction and language, and this study attempted to document the effect that the intentional use of the metaphor “leader as social construction” in story-making and focused group discussions had on individual leadership perceptions. Just as viewing disability as a socially constructed reality changes our understandings about who is disabled and what disability “is”, this study explored how and in what ways the sharing of the “leader as social construction” metaphorical leadership story changed individual understandings about what leaders and leadership are. This research sought to make obvious the highly pliable nature of the leadership construct, allowing it to be seen as available to everyone in all contexts in which they might find themselves. As Drath (2001, p. 150) indicated,

If a person is not a leader simply on his or her own but as a result of participation in some relational process, then we have a new and potentially powerful tool for recognizing leadership and for making it happen.

Research Question

A two-part research question guided this study: (1) to what extent and (2) in what way(s) are individual graduate business and public administration students' perceptions of leaders and leadership altered (along a "flexible/inflexible" continuum) by the intentional use of the metaphor "leader as social construction" in focused group discussions?

General Research Procedures

This study was primarily qualitative in nature, though Q-Methodology, which was the main data collection method used, does have a quantitative component. The model illustrated in Figure 3 (p. 177) is descriptive of the methodological technique used. Participant understandings about leaders and leadership (specifically focused on the "flexible versus inflexible continuum") were revealed through the use of Q-Methodology (a perception revealing ranking process suitable for use with small groups) both prior to and after a focused group discussion revolving around the "leader as social construction" metaphor. Two focus groups were held (each composed of two study sessions one week apart), each involving 2-3 participants. Participants were drawn from a Graduate School of Business and Economics Master of Business Administration (MBA) Program, and a College of Arts and Sciences Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program at a mid-sized university in the Pacific Northwest. It was hypothesized that these populations

would have predetermined understandings about leaders and leadership due to their programs of study. There were five participants total, three women and two men. Participants also completed written interviews to further explore their subjective understandings about the flexible/inflexible nature of leaders and leadership, and to add depth to the Q-Method data that was obtained. Focus group data was tertiary, but provided additional depth of findings. Participants received gift cards valued at \$40 for participating in this study.

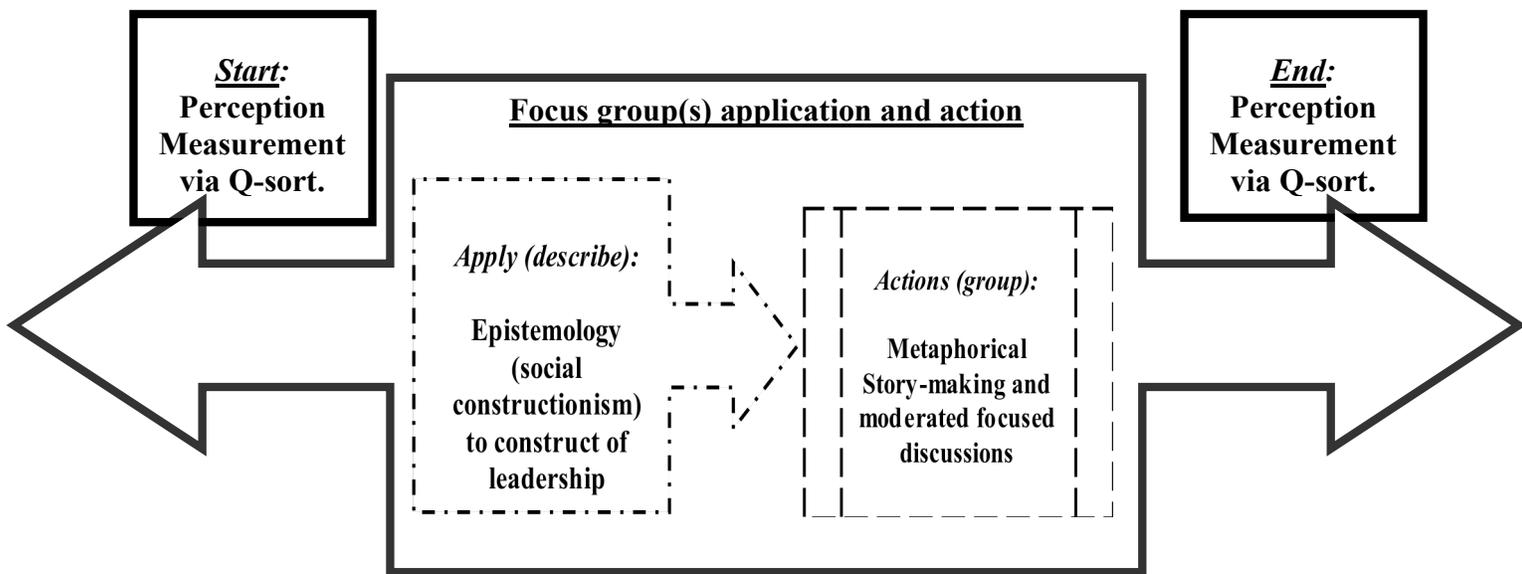
Review of the Methodology

After an initial (“blind”) Q-Sort ranking exercise was conducted with both sets of participants, the initial focus group was held (during session one), and the participants were briefly introduced to social constructionism, metaphor and story making. This was followed by a brief moderated (researcher-led) discussion revolving around these topics, including the intentional use of the “leader as social construction” metaphor. The second session, held one week later, involved the participants completing another Q-Sort ranking exercise, which was followed by the written interview process; Q-Sort supplemental written interview data was obtained from all study participants (these written interviews occurred after the second Q-Sort administration only). In the written interviews themselves, the participants were asked to elaborate on their most extreme pre and post (focus group) Q-sort rankings, and their actual Q-Sort rankings were compared (by the participants themselves) and documented to elicit more in-depth information about their individual choices and about their perceptions of leadership.

As outlined in Chapter 3, analysis of this study’s data was done both by hand (in the case of focus group and Q-sort supplemental written interview data) and, in the case

of the Q-sort data itself, by a recommended Q-Methodology data analysis software package (for Macintosh) known as PQMethod (Schmolck and Atkinson, n.d.). PQMethod data analysis provided detailed initial profiles of each participant’s Q-Sort rankings, and an individual Q-Sort profile was created for each person that reflected both their pre and their post focus group Q-sort ranking results. This allowed pre and post “intervention” (focus group) data comparisons to be made easily by the researcher. The narrative (verbal) focus group data itself was tertiary, and, as indicated in Chapter 3, was content analyzed to discover any patterns or themes that emerged and that were related to each individual participant’s understandings about leaders and leadership.

Figure 2
Research Methodology Model



Content analysis (Patton, 2002), allows the researcher to distill “core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453) held within the data. Supplemental written interview data, also

content analyzed, were then paired with Q-Sort data to provide not only a description of each individual's subjective perceptions about leaders and leadership (which were discovered through the Q-Sort exercise itself), but a more detailed picture about why each participant ranked the Q-Sort statements positioned at each of the extremes as they did. This pairing revealed the areas of strongest feeling for each participant. When these pairings were combined with focus group data, a final profile was created that reflected whether and how perceptions (understandings) changed for each individual participant, and appropriate conclusions were drawn about the study question in relation to the profiles that emerged.

Summary of Findings

Results of the first Q-sort indicated that, since a majority of the consensus statements were classified as “inflexible”, and since the consensus statements that exhibited the most agreement among the study's participants did so only because they were ranked as neutral, it can be said that the participant's initial understandings about leadership are predominantly inflexible, but that they may be open to influence.

Next, since a majority of the consensus statements from the second Q-sort (post focus group) were classified as “flexible”, and since the consensus statements that exhibit the most agreement among participants are classified as flexible, it can be said that participant's post-focus group understandings about leadership are predominantly flexible. After the second Q-Sort, mixed understandings were evidenced, with a slight bend towards flexible understandings about leadership. Comparison of the results of the first and second Q-sorts supports these findings.

The written interview data, which showed that 4 out of the 5 study participants had slightly more flexible understandings about leaders and leadership after the focused group discussion, support the findings resulting from the first and second Q-Sort data analysis process; while leadership understandings were mixed, they were slightly less flexible after Q-Sort number one than they were after Q-Sort #2. This is to say that understandings became slightly more flexible after the focus group (but still showed evidence of being mixed).

The recorded focus group data also reflect these conclusions; while this study's participants had defined understandings about leaders and leadership both before and after the focused group discussion, analysis of the recorded data shows that their understandings were able to be classified as less flexible after the initial Q-Sort, and more flexible after the second Q-Sort exercise. These findings are evidenced in the way the study's guiding research question is answered in the sections that follow.

Discussion of the Results

Interpretation of the Findings

I believe that this study upheld the hypothesis that our understandings about leaders and leadership are primarily subjective, and that it would be beneficial to treat them as such. It was my initial belief that, though people likely had mixed understandings about leadership as applied to the "flexible versus inflexible" continuum (to put it more plainly, I believed that participants would come into the study with understandings about leaders and leadership that were both flexible and inflexible), I speculated that, in general, understandings would be primarily inflexible (i.e., essentialist, hierarchical, etc). Data from the first Q-Sort and the statements contained in the written interviews proved

this speculation to be true. However, the data obtained after the initial Q-Sort and the written interviews showed that participants' leadership understandings started out more flexible than I believed they would, and I was not able to say with any amount of definitiveness that their understandings were highly inflexible, just somewhat so.

Additionally, because social constructionism proved to be a very powerful lens through which to understand leaders and leadership for me personally, I speculated that it would be for others as well; thus, pairing constructionism with metaphor and story would alter leadership understandings, making them even more flexible than they initially would be. Again, the data upheld this speculation. The second Q-Sort, along with written interview data, showed that participants' leadership understandings became more flexible in general, especially when compared to the results seen after the initial Q-Sort exercise (which took place before the focus group, and before each participant's exposure to the social constructionism-metaphor-story linkage). Again, however, definitive conclusions were not possible.

In the end, participants' leadership understandings are still considered to be "mixed". This is to say that just like was measured at the outset of the study, each participant's understandings were both flexible and inflexible in nature, though they were slightly more flexible after the post-focus group Q-Sort exercise than they were initially. This finding is not surprising because when using a Postmodern epistemological framework, subjectivity is unavoidable, and thus it is impossible to have an understanding of anything that is truly "fixed" at any of the extremes (Burr, 1995), though we each may, in fact, believe this is not truly so.

Theoretical Implications of the Study

As was indicated at the outset of this research, the point of this work was not to develop a set of answers, definitions, practices or theories. The point of this work was to try and make evident the socially constructed nature of leadership realities, and then to explore possible tools of influence that could be used to enhance, create, mitigate or destroy those realities. In addition, this work sought to help deconstruct some of the more traditional understandings about leaders and leadership; previous decades have seen leadership theory and practice anchored at the extremes, and thus enmeshed in hierarchy and exclusivity. Understanding leaders and leadership as flexible and malleable, understanding them as realities that are available to everyone, and as practices that are social and thus continually emerging on many levels and in many ways, makes them better suited for increasingly interconnected and globalized contexts.

Relationship of the Current Study to Previous Research

This study attempted to add to past research that understands leaders and leadership from a primarily social perspective. The intent is not to discount the other discourses that have emerged and that continue to evolve and influence our understandings about what leaders and leadership “are” (for example, discourses that are concentrated on leadership traits and/or qualities). Rather, this study had as its purpose the goal of supplementing other discourses and perspectives, and further broadening understandings about the subject of leadership. Acknowledging that leaders are socially constructed, and that leadership is a socially constructed reality (what I refer to as a “pliable action paradigm” because leadership is an activity, but can have varied driving forces directing it; in the case of this study, that force would be social activity and

interaction) fundamentally changes the nature of the construct. Just like Morgan (1997) did when he metaphorically viewed organizations through the lenses of “culture” and “organism”, the “leader as social construction” metaphor allows us to view leadership through a focused lens, understanding it in very specific ways that open it up and make it available to everyone (yet also exclude the other ways that it can be understood). Through Social Constructionism, leadership became pliable, non-essentialist, non-elitist, non-hierarchical, subjective and more compatible with increasingly diverse and continually emergent environments.

As discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, there have been a number of researchers who have explored the social construction of reality throughout history, in particular since the treatise *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann (1966) formally established the use of the epistemology in the field of sociology, and Kuhn (as cited in Patton, 2002) used constructionism in the realm of science with the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Constructionism itself, however, has much more ancient roots, going back to Plato and the Allegory of the Cave found in *The Republic* (1992).

Contemplating social constructionism, particularly within the context of doctoral-level leadership research that is imbued with a concern for social justice and equity, made me curious not only about what the implications of these subjectivity-based stances were for me personally as well as for society in general, but also, more specifically, what the implications were for leaders and would-be leaders in particular. How might post-modern leadership educators, others concerned with leader preparation, and leadership

practitioners be able to alter leadership perceptions if leaders and leadership were socially constructed and thus had no “essential” nature or “inherent” properties? And, how could such alterations affect our society and its people? This study was an attempt to examine the possibilities.

As Gergen (1999) stated when discussing the failure of narrow, objective and modernist systems and called for new ways of understanding, “. . . the grand institutions of science, religion, government, education - designed for the benefit of all - have not only fallen dramatically short of their aims, but often seem to generate oppression, environmental degrading, and armed warfare” (p. 4). We need leaders who recognize that the old systems, those that are grounded solidly in individualism and hierarchy, are no longer viable. In a time of “rapid and sweeping global change . . . how are we to go on when alien – even hostile – ways of life begin to replace those we hold dear?” (Gergen, 1999, p. 2). We need to begin thinking in new ways about all the things that we, up until now, may have taken for granted, including what leaders and leadership are (O’Farrell, 1999).

Morgan (1997) echoed the need to question assumptions, in particular during times of rapid contextual flux like those we are experiencing today. He stated, “in times of change it is vital to be in touch with the assumptions and theories that are guiding our practice and to be able to shape and reshape them for our different ends” (p. 376).

Implicit in these statements is the notion that as leaders we must be fluid, and as teachers we must train future leaders, a classification that could conceptually include everyone under a social constructionist epistemology, in the value and need for such fluidity.

Traditional leadership, management, and other perspectives often “lock us into fixed [perceptual] frameworks. They offer a way of seeing that in effect says, ‘this is THE WAY to see’. As a result, we often get trapped by the metaphors on which they are based” (Morgan, 1997, p. 376). Taking a constructionist approach allowed us to see the value of learning about leadership by focusing on interactional processes. In examining how such processes influence leadership perceptions, we were able to escape the focus on the traits, behaviors, and individual relationships of those engaged in it, as has been seen in many of the more “traditional” (for example, trait centered) leadership research approaches. We were able to realize that leadership emerges in a full range of ways, and that it is not confined to any singular context or approach, reliant on a multitude of specific and pre-defined personal traits, or subject to static and inflexible individual perceptions. In essence, leaders and leadership have been set free.

While he outlined what leadership “is and has been” in the twenty-first century, Drath (2001) suggested that many people are now confused about leadership and what, exactly, leaders “are”. In his view, this confusion was primarily due to the fact that our ways of both understanding one another and interrelating have changed so dramatically in recent years. He suggested that our perceptions of leadership have been handed down to us from the past, and are, essentially, now mismatched with the contexts they exist within. Since we now face any number of circumstances where understanding leadership simply as something a person possesses, exercises or “does” simply doesn’t make sense, it is clear that the more traditional approaches may be too stunted to be workable or, worse yet, singularly embraced. Instead, we are increasingly being called upon to

perceive leaders and leadership as interactional, defining what these constructs are primarily by virtue of context, conversation and community.

In *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership*, (Bass, 1990), we are provided with an introduction to leadership theory in a section titled "The Meaning of Leadership". In this part of their text, the authors provide a substantive overview of what the concept of leadership "is" (e.g., how it is defined, what it means, and what characteristics it has). The outline given to the reader was based upon the vast amount of research that has taken place on the subject of leadership in the last century. Thus, we can witness not only the beginnings, but the evolutionary nature of leadership theory by examining Bass and Stogdill's (Bass, 1990) work. Starting in the early 1900's, leadership was seen as a focus of group processes, then as an aspect of "personality", then as the art of inducing compliance or of exercising influence, and finally as an actual act or specific set of (learnable or genetically inspired) behaviors. Next on the time-line came the view of leadership as a power relationship, then an instrument of goal achievement, followed by an explanation of leadership as an effect of followership. Most recently (Bass, 1990), leadership has been studied and defined as a "combination of elements" (pp. 11-19), which at last embraced multiple theories and viewpoints, and was somewhat more flexible than prior descriptions. The Bass and Stogdill text's introduction to the evolution of leadership ends by concluding that leadership is an "evolving, expanding conceptualization", which agrees with Yukl (1981) in that "leadership research should be designed to provide information relevant to the entire range of definitions, so that over time it will be possible to compare the utility of different conceptualizations and arrive at

some consensus on the matter” (p. 5). So, at least among these well-established leadership theorists, even going back two decades, how leadership is defined and what it “is” is apparently left up to informed choice, which is to be guided intelligently by the purposes of the inquiry. Increased flexibility is certainly evidenced by these new approaches and definitions, but these efforts still fall short of producing the highly flexible understandings of leaders and leadership that current postmodern contexts require.

As discussed in previous sections of this dissertation, noticeably absent in the discussions about leadership in most if not all of the leadership literature that was reviewed for this study, is the mention of the concept of the leader as a social construct, and of leadership as a socially constructed reality. Theoretically, at least through the 1990’s, the closest related concept seems to be “leadership as an emerging effect of interaction” (Bass, 1990, p. 15), where leadership is seen partly as a product of interaction. Here leadership “happens” as a result of social processes, which makes progress by taking us away from notions of individualism or traits, but, once again, it simply doesn’t go far enough to be suitable. Additionally, this description fails to be suitable because its theoretical base is passive. As Bass (1990) pointed out when he stated, “an individual often emerges as [a] leader as a consequence of interactions within the group that arouse expectations that he or she, rather than someone else, can serve the group most usefully by helping it to attain its objectives” (p. 16). Passivity runs counter to flexibility because it requires that leadership is primarily spontaneously emergent, which limits its usefulness significantly.

I have referenced Bass and Stogdill's work extensively because it is seen in the field as being highly representative of the literature and thought on the subject of leadership well into the last decade. As such, it is expected to provide a solid historical baseline against which to compare where it is we are going with where the field has been in the past. Multiple popular and well known leadership paradigms, including Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967), Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey, 1984), as well as recent transactional and transformational models (Avolio & Bass, 2002), also all remain too inflexible to be of optimum use as we move into an era of heightened interconnectedness and diversity. The requirements that accompany the understandings of leadership that these other theories present remain too essentialist or exclusive to be useful in and of themselves, and serve to limit the reach of other approaches when combined with them

By examining the history of leadership theory, the niche we were trying to help fill through this research should now be evident. Indeed, examining the literature of the period between 1990 and 2007 shows that, while progress has been made and more inclusive and holistic leadership theory has been developed and found useful, much work can still be done. There remains a lack of leadership theory and leader education approaches that operate from the premise that leaders and leadership are socially constructed realities, and that perceptions of these constructs can be altered, resulting in new realities for those involved. This circumstance, however, is changing quickly too.

Drath (2001) specifically uses the social constructionist theory of Gergen (1999) to study leadership, defining what he terms "relational leadership forms". As opposed to

“personal leadership forms”, which focus on personal traits, a relational form focuses on “the whole system of relations . . . as the creative ground for leadership” (Drath, 2001, p. xv). In his work, Drath fully acknowledges that leaders (and followers) are socially constructed and communal. Sociologist Deutscher (as cited in Patton, 2002) made the following statement which provides the perfect summarization of the theoretical backbone of this study,

We knew that human behavior was rarely if ever influenced or explained by an isolated variable; we knew that it was impossible to assume that any set of such variables was additive . . . we knew that the complex mathematics of the interaction among any set of variables was incomprehensible to us. In effect, although we knew they did not exist, we defined them into being (p. 33).

Contrary to common understanding, we create, or, in Deutscher’s terminology, we “define”, our own reality. Thus, we define a leader into being just as we define disability into being. I say that this is contrary to our common understanding because contained in much of our current thinking, and indeed in how our everyday reality is thought to be constructed as well as the way that knowledge is created and shared, are concepts like “essentialism”, “realism” and “objectivity”. I agree with Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that “such a view of reality – so called objective reality – leaves out human aspects of reality, in particular the real perceptions, conceptions, motivations and actions that constitute most of what we experience” (p. 146). Acceptance of subjectivity allowed us to ask the following question; how real is a reality that does not take human perceptions into account when asserting itself upon us?

These issues are not questions of truth or fiction regarding traditional concepts of leadership, but expressions which hold that anchoring leadership in an essentialist

framework creates an unnecessary, and as will be revealed, also untrue, “either/or” dichotomy, making the role of leader available to some, but not to others. When this occurs, leadership becomes anchored at the extremes, and its practice and study moves directly into the realm of the outdated. This work has been an attempt to expand our understandings about what leaders and leadership are, viewing them as pliable and subjective, and removing the anchors that make them exclusive, unwieldy and of limited usefulness in post-modern environments.

The results of this study have shown that individual perceptions (along a “flexible versus inflexible” continuum) about leaders and leadership generally started out mixed (i.e., they were both inflexible and flexible), but were likely to lean towards inflexibility (possibly in part due to the predominance of essentialist and hierarchy-based leadership theory during the last several decades). However, using the lens of social constructionism, and the tools of metaphor and story-making, individual understandings about leadership, though remaining mixed in general, leaned more towards flexibility than they did initially. This result provides clear impetus to continue exploring the relationship between leadership and social constructionism, metaphor and story-making, potentially expanding upon the work reported here.

Implications for Educators and Policy

The implications for both educators and policy are directly related to one another; leadership (and other) educators and policymakers (and leadership practitioners) need to utilize the lens of social constructionism in discussions and analyses of leadership, and they need to implement the tools of metaphor and story-making in both teaching and everyday practice. Leadership researcher-writers like Gardner (1995), Simmons (2001)

and Boje (1991) have been using story as the tool that it is (both as a teaching and practical tool) for over a decade. Morgan (1997) has effectively used metaphor as a teaching, analytical and practical device in the area of organizational development and management; and Drath (2001) and Meindl (1998) have both taken a constructionist perspective when investigating leadership theory and practice. Lastly, the publication of the *Handbook of Constructionist Research* (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008) means that Constructionism is moving rapidly into multiple new disciplines, including the study of emotion, medical knowledge and management and organizational development. This study adds to the work of these scholars (and integrates it) and the many others mentioned in this dissertation (as well as others who have not been mentioned). This work has shown that exposure to social constructionism and the use of a metaphor-based story in discussions about the nature of leadership can impact our understanding about what leaders and leadership are. In this particular case, the exposure has shown that it is possible to make understandings more flexible, and thus make them more useful in increasingly diverse and interconnected contexts.

Educators and policy-makers (and theorists/researchers) need to begin utilizing leadership paradigms and frameworks (both practical and philosophical/theoretical) that are highly pliable and exceptionally inclusive not simply to be more effective and efficient by matching form to function, but to address concerns over social justice and social equity issues. Traditional leadership theory has been somewhat elitist, highly essentialist, very dependent upon genetic or learned traits and/or actions, and thus, also very exclusionary. If an individual is not charismatic, for example, is there no hope for

them to become effective leaders, or leaders at all? Is charisma really something that can be learned? Is being charismatic all it takes to lead effectively? Even if charisma is viewed as just one piece of the leadership puzzle, what about those people who do or do not have the other “necessary” pieces? One question leads to several more, and taking a Constructionist view actually allows us to deconstruct reality, be it leadership reality or one at work in another arena, exposing the assumptions and structures that support it.

Again, the idea is not to press for abandonment of traditional leadership understandings, theory and practice, but to decrease our tendency to over-emphasize singular approaches and myopic beliefs about leadership as a subject, and about leaders as real-life embodiments of that subject. At the same time that we are seeking to expand upon tradition, we need to be questioning all of the assumptions about leaders and leadership upon which tradition has been based. Such questioning will, inevitably, lead us to recognize that everyone has the capacity to be a leader, and that leadership emerges in multiple forms and at various levels on life’s stage; no one has exclusive rights, and we can all claim the role if we so choose (and, I would argue, that we are all leaders to some degree or another, even if it’s unconscious). “Leader” is a label we can claim for ourselves, and not something given, bestowed or necessarily earned. Viewing and understanding leaders and leadership as socially constructed allows us to contemplate the nature of these realities, and invites everyone into the conversation.

Study Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

As intimated in the previous section, and as touched upon in Chapters 1 and 2, a goal of this study was to add to the growing body of research that utilizes a social constructionist framework in its investigations, in particular when examining leadership.

This study has shown that exposure to social constructionism, in particular when used in conjunction with metaphor and story, influences individual leadership perceptions to a small degree, particularly along a “flexible/inflexible” continuum. This influence is important, as discussed throughout the body of this dissertation, and as directly stated in the preceding pages; an increasingly diverse and interconnected world requires more flexible and inclusive understandings about what leaders and leadership are to be optimally useful and socially just.

The results of this study were not overwhelming or entirely clear. While leadership perceptions were shown to have become more flexible after the focus group “intervention” and use of the “leader as social construction” metaphor, the change was not dramatic and participant’s understandings about leaders and leadership were still classified as “mixed”. In other words, while their understandings about what leaders and leadership are became more flexible, inflexible understandings were still evidenced for a majority of the participants in the study.

One possible issue that has emerged is that, as some participants reported, some of the Q-Set statements may have been too similar to one another, and Q-Methodology requires that very distinct statements be given to each participant in the Q-Sort ranking exercise (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005). In future research (and prior to initiating a larger scale study), I would revise the Q-Set statements, likely eliminating a few, in an effort to see if the final results became more definitive.

Another possible explanation of the findings is that the focus groups themselves may have influenced the participants. Simply gathering together and/or being exposed to

the subject matter, and/or being around the researcher (being in a “research environment”) could have caused the mixed findings, and/or altered the result so that it appears that the participants’ leadership perceptions have changed (become more flexible), when in fact the change is short lived or non-sincere (i.e., was done simply to please the researcher or other participants). Due to the high level of subjectivity embraced by this study, however (as discussed in Chapter 2), such a result would not be deemed greatly problematic; since meaning is created socially, and since words and language directly influence and create our perceptions, a weak level Hawthorne Effect would be acceptable. Again, however, it should be noted that since such changes are generally temporary and/or not genuine, future research on this subject may want to address this concern more thoroughly, making sure, to the extent possible, that such an effect is mitigated in an effort to better link perception changes to the intervention.

There are multiple next steps available for future research. Continuing to investigate the linkage between social constructionism, metaphor and story-making is necessary, and, in addition to working with other researchers exploring these areas, a larger and more extensive study very similar to the one just conducted should be done (though, as just indicated, a second smaller-scale study with revised Q-Set statements would need to be conducted first). The purpose of a larger endeavor would be two-fold; first, to see if a similar result could be obtained but with a slightly larger population, and second, to see if a more dramatic result is obtainable (again, revising the Q-Set may serve to address this problem, at least partially).

Another of the primary limits of this study was the breadth of the intervention that was possible. Time constraints meant that study participants were only exposed to very general information regarding constructionism, and the focus groups were of short duration and low interaction levels. One implication for future research is that a more extensive “intervention” along with a lengthier focus group session might magnify the results obtained in this study (or, possibly, negate them). Depending on the outcome of further constructionism-based research efforts, additional studies could be conducted with larger populations (which would require the use of different methodologies since both Q-Methodology and focus groups are most effective with small populations, $n= 3$ to 12).

A possible next step that would fulfill the initial requirements for expanding upon the current study without going beyond the limits of its methodology would be to conduct an actual graduate-level class (lasting several weeks or months), encompassing the study within it. This would allow a much more in-depth exploration of constructionism, metaphor and story, relating them to leadership (and quite possibly other areas as well, organizational development and program analysis among them), also allowing more extensive discussions and group-level debate. Q-Methodology could be used (depending on the size of the class), and several focus group discussions could take place, allowing a much broader exploration of the linkage set-forth in this research work.

**THE LEADER LABEL: USING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND
METAPHOR TO INFLUENCE THE LEADERSHIP PERCEPTIONS OF
GRADUATE BUSINESS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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This research examined the use of metaphor as a tool of discourse, applying it specifically to the field of leadership. Utilizing a post-modern social constructionist framework under which the construct “leader” was highly pliable, and was created, enhanced, mitigated or destroyed via language and interaction, this study investigated whether and in what ways the intentional use of metaphor altered the individual leadership perceptions of graduate business and public administration students. Leadership understandings classified as “flexible” and “inflexible” were the primary focus of this inquiry given the hypothesized need for increasingly flexible understandings in globalized contexts. Conventional perceptions of leaders are themselves metaphorical: the leader is actually in the lead, the first to move forward. This is an image appropriate for certain circumstances, but is one seen as less relevant today because it implies an often complex hierarchy, connotes exclusivity, and ignores context.

A two-part research question guided this study: (1) to what extent and (2) in what way(s) were individual graduate business and public administration students’ perceptions of leaders and leadership altered (along a “flexible/inflexible” continuum) by the intentional use of the metaphor “leader as social construction” in focused group discussions?

Investigative methodologies were primarily qualitative and based upon the interaction between Q-Methodology and focus groups; since meaning is generated

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socially and subjectivity is valued, the aim was to explain individual perception change using interactional techniques. Written interviews added depth to the findings.

The results of the study show that although perceptions were mixed (i.e., they were flexible and inflexible both before and after the focus group intervention), exposure to the “leader as social construction” metaphor increased flexible leadership understandings among a majority of the participants. These findings serve as a catalyst for future research.

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“The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind” ~ Kahlil Gibran

This work is dedicated to:

The voice of God inside that means I am never alone; it guides me if I can summon the will to listen, and manage to stay out of the way.

My partner, James Ginn, one of the most giving people I have ever known, whose love and support through this process made all the difference in the world.

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Appendix A

Assumptions of a Social Constructionist Epistemology

Appendix A

Assumptions of a Social Constructionist Epistemology

Burr (1995) identified four basic assumptions of a social constructionist epistemological position:

1. A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge - The world does not present itself objectively to the observer, but is known through human experience which is largely influenced by language.
2. Historical and cultural specificity - The categories in language used to classify things emerge from the social interaction within a group of people at a particular time and in a particular place. Categories of understanding, then, are situational.
3. Knowledge is sustained by social process - How reality is understood at a given moment is determined by the conventions of communication in force at that time. The stability of social life determines how concrete our knowledge seems to be.
4. Knowledge and social action go together - Reality is socially constructed by interconnected patterns of communication behaviour. Within a social group or culture, reality is defined not so much by individual acts, but by complex and organized patterns of ongoing actions.

Appendix B
Sample Q-Sort Score Sheet

Appendix B

Sample Q-Sort score sheet¹(van Exel & de Graaf, 2005)

Annex C: Score sheet for Q sorting

RESPONDENT NUMBER _____ NAME _____

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									

DISAGREE
COUNT: ____

NEUTRAL OR
NOT RELEVANT
COUNT: ____

AGREE
COUNT: ____

¹ NOTE: Ranking columns here are numbered as 1 through 9. Though study participants used this exact score sheet, the researcher classified the columns differently for data processing reasons; -4 through 4, with 0 (equal to 5 on this sheet) as neutral. This score sheet shows the researcher selected distribution that was used in this study.

Appendix C
Q-Set Statements

Appendix C

Q-Set Statements

The Q-set used in this study consisted of 42 individual statements, which were rank-ordered by participants using a researcher-provided structured grid (see Appendix B for the distribution used in this study). These statements were derived from the leadership concourse, with a concourse defined as “the flow of communicability surrounding any topic” (Brown, 1993). The statements below are indicative of opinions and arguments (van Exel and de Graaf, 2005) regarding leaders and leadership, and they are thought to be a representative sample of such by the researcher. This concourse is limited, however, to statements that reflect perceptions of leaders and leadership that are “flexible”, “inflexible” or somewhere on the continuum that lies between these extremes, since this research is exclusively investigating this perception range. Q-set statements can be derived from literature, media, popular culture, or personal communications (van Exel and de Graaf, 2005) and thus they are created using the full concourse surrounding the topic. This variety is appropriate due to the high value placed upon subjectivity in Q-Methodological (Brown, 1993) and qualitative research, as well as to the popularity of the subject of leadership in recent decades within business, management, education, psychology, sociology and organizational development. Each of the statements below were been classified as embracing “flexible” (F, 19 total statements) or “inflexible” (I, 23 total statements) understandings of leaders and leadership, which will be important in data analysis (see Chapter 4).

<u>Q-Set Statements</u>
1. Everyone is a leader. (F)
2. Leaders are born, not made. (I)
3. People can learn to be leaders. (F)
4. Leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a “special something”. (I)
5. Being a leader requires that a person act in certain ways. (I)
6. Leadership is situation and context specific; not everyone can lead in every situation. (I)
7. It takes talent to be a leader. (I)
8. Leadership is a natural result of group processes. (F)
9. Leadership is an aspect of a person’s personality. (I)
10. Leadership means that you “induce compliance” among followers. (I)
11. Leadership is a power relationship. (I)
12. Leadership is nothing more than motivating people to achieve group or organizational goals. (I)
13. Leadership is strictly an effect of followership (and vice versa); one naturally produces the other. (F)

14. Leadership is a combination of the genetic and the learned. (F)
15. Leadership is something available to a select few people. (I)
16. Leadership involves a structured hierarchy. (I)
17. Leadership requires a high level of experience. (I)
18. Leadership flows from the top of an organization or group to the bottom; so we can say that it “trickles down”. (I)
19. Leadership is bottom up, it starts at the bottom of an organization or group and then flows upward. (I)
20. Followers create leaders. (I)
21. Being a leader requires training and education. (I)
22. Leaders can be easily created. (F)
23. The nature of leaders and leadership needs to be flexible; that is, different types of leaders are required in different situations. (F)
24. Leaders emerge as a result of the environment. (I)
25. Leadership demands continual adaptability. (F)
26. Being a leader first requires that you have some amount of “power” over others. (I)
27. We each decide, individually, who can and who cannot be a leader. (F)
28. Leadership requires charisma. (I)
29. As human beings we define what leadership is. (F)
30. Leadership is mutually exclusive; one person leading excludes others from taking that role. (I)
31. Leadership is for the “gifted”. (I)
32. Leaders and leadership emerge primarily from our social interactions. (F)
33. Leaders emerge based on context and the needs of the group. (F)
34. Leadership is a “process” versus a “thing”. (F)
35. In any given situation or context, leadership can switch from one individual to another. (F)
36. Leadership is adaptable versus inflexible. (F)
37. Leaders and leadership are socially constructed (that is, they are created through our mutual agreed upon definitions which result from social interactions). (F)
38. Leaders emerge based on multiple, distinct, and identifiable, factors that cannot be controlled. (I)
39. Leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (i.e. – leadership is a mystery). (F)
40. Leadership involves identifying the “niche” in a situation and then filling it. (I)
41. We decide collectively who can and cannot be a leader. (F)
42. Leadership is about relationships. (F)

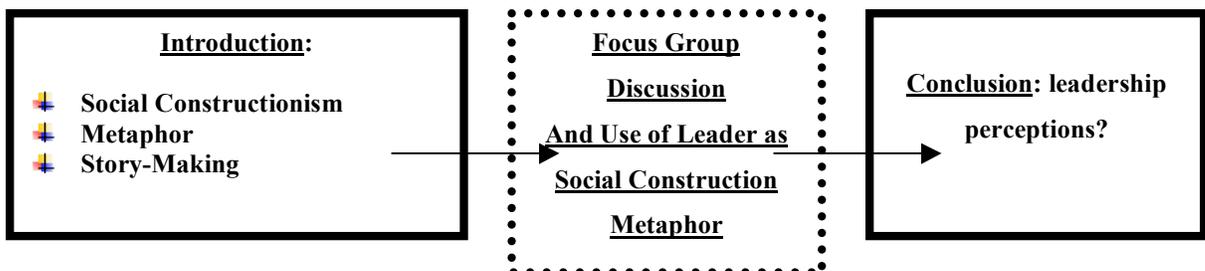
Appendix D
Focus Group Schema

Appendix D

Focus Group Schema

In this study, there were two focus groups used, each took place at the same academic institution (on different nights of the same week). Each focus group consisted of 2-3 people (only small groups are required under both Q-methodology and focus group guidelines as indicated in the literature of both subjects) for a total of 5-6 participants between the two groups, and each group was facilitated by the researcher, who focused the discussion on social constructionism and the “leader as social construction” metaphor. The researcher guided the ensuing discussions using questions (this portion was emergent) to prompt participants. Both focus group sessions were audio recorded for data collection and analysis purposes. Participants received remuneration in the form of a gift-card (\$40 value) for participating in the study at its conclusion, which included participating in the Q-Sorting process twice (during session #1 and then again during session #2), the focus group discussion, and the completion of a written interview.

During the focus groups themselves, the participants were briefly introduced to Social Constructionism, and then to both metaphor and story-making (these introductions were based on the entire range of dialogue revolving around each topic, which is known as the entire “concourse” under Q-methodology, and “discourse” under Constructionism) as tools linked to the influence of human perceptions. This introduction was followed by a moderated discussion revolving around these three topics, including the discussion of the “leader as social construction” metaphor within the group. The session ended with a brief discussion about the new views (if any) that participants had of leaders and leadership. Each focus group session lasted 30-35 minutes, with 20 minutes devoted to topic introductions, followed by 10-15 minutes of discussion (as required).



Appendix E

Participant Data Form and Informed Consent

Appendix E

Participant Data Form and Informed Consent

Leadership Perception Study – Seattle University

Jeffrey Zacko-Smith, Researcher

Participant Data Form

Please fill out this form as completely as possible, and return it to the researcher. *Your personal information is considered confidential, and will not be released to anyone for any purpose.* It is only intended to provide general demographic data for the study.

1. Dates you attended the study session (check one):

_____ Mondays, February 19 and 26, 2007

_____ Thursdays, February 15 and 22, 2007

2. Your sex (check one): _____ Male or _____ Female

3. Your general degree program at Seattle University (check one):

_____ Public Administration – graduate level

_____ Business – graduate level

0. Your age range (check one):

_____ 18 – 25

_____ 26 – 35

_____ 36 – 45

_____ 46 – 60

_____ 61+

Printed name _____ & Signature _____

Thank you!

SEATTLE UNIVERSITY
901 12th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98122
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title	THE LEADER LABEL: USING METAPHOR AND DISCOURSE TO INFLUENCE THE LEADERSHIP PERCEPTIONS OF GRADUATE BUSINESS & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS
Investigator	Jeffrey D. Zacko-Smith, M.P.A. 1820 25 th Avenue Seattle, WA 98122 Phone: (206) 419-5954 E-mail: jdzs@mac.com
Advisor	Dr. John Jacob Gardiner Seattle University, College of Education Phone: (206) 296-6171
Source of Support	This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in education (EdD) at Seattle University.
Purpose	You are being asked to participate in doctoral research that investigates how graduate-level business and public administration student's perceptions of leaders and leadership can be influenced. You will be asked to take 2 assessments in which you rank 42 statements, as well as participate in a focus group and final short interview. You are one of between 4 and 20 subjects being asked to participate in this study.
Risks and Benefits	There are no known risks to participants involved in this study. Benefits may include an expanded perspective regarding leaders and leadership, and increased self-knowledge.
Compensation	Participating in this project will require no monetary cost to you, and participants will be paid \$40 at the conclusion of the study for their time.
Confidentiality	You will appear only as "a participant" when data and results are presented in written or oral form. All written, audio/video materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the investigator's office, to which no one but the investigator has access. Your name will never appear in any publication. All materials will be kept for a minimum of 3 years and then destroyed.
Right to Withdraw	You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may otherwise be entitled.
Summary of Results	A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Voluntary Consent</u></p> <p>Please read carefully and then sign and date the form below!</p> <p>A copy will be provided to you.</p>	<p>I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.</p> <p>I understand that should I have any concerns about my participation in this study, I may call the investigator who is asking me to participate, Jeffrey D Zacko-Smith, at (206) 323-6015, or (206) 419-5954, or smithj1@seattleu.edu</p> <p>If I have any concerns that my rights are being violated, I may contact Dr. John Jacob Gardiner at (206) 296-6171, or Dr. Mary Walker, Chair of the Seattle University Institutional Review Board, at (206) 296-6161.</p>
---	---

Participant's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

Appendix F

Participant Data Profile Summary

Appendix F

Participant Data Profile Summary

Approximately 600 possible participants were directly² solicited for this study; from that solicitation, approximately 25 indicated interest³ in participating, 10 enrolled⁴, and 5 participated⁵. Participants were able to choose between two study-sessions held on consecutive Mondays, or two sessions held on consecutive Thursdays in the month of February, 2007. There were two men and three women in this study. Two participants were enrolled in the university's College of Arts and Sciences Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program, and three participants were enrolled in the university's School of Business and Economics Master of Business Administration (MBA) Program. Four of the participants were in the 26-35 year-old age range, while one participant was in the 36-45 year-old age range. There were no participants 25 or under or 46 or older in the study groups. Three participants chose to attend Thursday study sessions, and two participants chose to attend Monday study sessions (as described in Chapter 3 of this dissertation).

ID#	Dates Attended Study Sessions	Sex	Degree Program	Age range⁶
1	February 15 & 22, 2007 (Thurs)	M	MPA	26-35
2	February 15 & 22, 2007 (Thurs)	F	MPA	26-35
3	February 15 & 22, 2007 (Thurs)	F	MBA	36-45
4	February 19 & 26, 2007 (Mon)	F	MBA	26-35
5	February 19 & 26, 2007 (Mon)	M	MBA	26-35

² Via e-mail, in-class presentations by the researcher, and faculty announcements, as outlined in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

³ Interest was indicated by e-mail or phone contact with the researcher.

⁴ Enrollment was done via a website (participants would sign-up on the website and receive communication about the study sessions by e-mail or by visiting the site). The site can be viewed here: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LeaderPerceptionStudy/>

⁵ Participation is defined as showing up for two consecutive study sessions as required, taking all administered instruments and participating in a focus group. All of the participants who started this study followed it through to its conclusion.

⁶ Available age ranges were: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-60, or 61+.

Appendix G

Post Q-Sort Written Interview Instrument

Appendix G

Post Q-Sort Written Interview Instrument

Leadership Perception Study – February 2007

Seattle University

INSTRUCTIONS: In an effort to aid the researcher's understanding of your rankings on both of the Q-Sort exercises, please take a few moments to answer each of the following 5 questions (you can match your answers on each score sheet to the numbered cards to figure out which statements you selected. Please **DO NOT** change any of your score sheet replies):

1. On the **first** Q-Sort, you ranked two statements as "**most disagree**". *Why did you most disagree with the two statements that you did?*
2. On the **first** Q-Sort, you ranked two statements as "**most agree**". *Why did you most agree with the two statements that you did?*
3. On the **second** Q-Sort, you ranked two statements as "**most disagree**". *Why did you most disagree with the two statements that you did?*
4. On the **second** Q-Sort, you ranked two statements as "**most agree**". *Why did you most agree with the two statements that you did?*
5. Did your answers change significantly between the first and second Q-Sort exercises as far as which statements you most agreed and most disagreed with? *If so, why do you think this happened? If not, why do you think they stayed the same?*

Appendix H

Statements Most Agreed With and Most Disagreed With

Appendix H

Statements Most Agreed With and Most Disagreed With

Participant #	Q-Sort #1 Most Disagree	Q-Sort #1, Most Agree	Q-Sort #2, Most Disagree	Q-Sort #2, Most Agree	Change(s) between first and second Q- sort?
1	1 and 11	4 and 6	1 and 26	4 and 21	Yes
2	14 and 39	42 and 25	10 and 2	42 and 25	Yes
3	21 and 17	28 and 7	22 and 26	7 and 28	Yes
4	13 and 30	4 and 24	13 and 26	28 and 33	Yes
5	39 and 26	25 and 42	26 and 16	4 and 42	Yes

Statements ranked as “most agree” and/or “most disagree” on at least one of the two Q-Sort Exercises (21 out of a possible 42 statements were utilized):

- 1 – Everyone is a leader.
- 2 – Leaders are born and not made.
- 4 – Leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a “special something” that makes them great.
- 6 – Leadership is situation and context specific; not everyone can lead in every situation.
- 7 – It takes talent to be a leader.
- 10 – Leadership means that you “induce compliance” among followers in some way.
- 11 – Leadership is a power relationship.
- 13 – Leadership is strictly an effect of followership (and vice versa); one naturally produces the other.
- 14 – Leadership is a combination of the genetic and the learned.
- 16 – leadership involves a hierarchy (for example, like an organizational chart within your company).
- 17 – Leadership requires a high level of experience.
- 21 – Being a leader requires training and education.
- 22 – Leaders can be easily created.
- 24 – Leaders emerge as a result of the environment (that is, people become leaders based on the context, group, or organization they are a part of).
- 25 – Leadership demands continual adaptability.
- 26 – Being a leader first requires that you have “power” over other people.
- 28 – Leadership requires charisma.
- 30 – Leadership is mutually exclusive; one person leading excludes others from taking a leadership role.
- 33 – Leaders emerge based on context and the needs of the group or the organization.
- 39 – Leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (in other words, leadership is a mystery).
- 42 – Leadership is primarily about relationships.

Statements selected as “most agree” by one or more participants:

4 – Leadership can be learned, though most successful leaders also have a “special something” that makes them great.

6 – Leadership is situation and context specific; not everyone can lead in every situation.

7 – It takes talent to be a leader.

21 – Being a leader requires training and education.

24 – Leaders emerge as a result of the environment (that is, people become leaders based on the context, group, or organization they are a part of).

25 – Leadership demands continual adaptability.

28 – Leadership requires charisma.

33 – Leaders emerge based on context and the needs of the group or the organization.

39 – Leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (in other words leadership is a mystery).

42 – Leadership is primarily about relationships.

Statements selected as “most disagree” by one or more participants:

1 – Everyone is a leader.

2 – Leaders are born and not made.

10 – Leadership means that you “induce compliance” among followers in some way.

11 – Leadership is a power relationship.

13 – Leadership is strictly an effect of followership (and vice versa); one naturally produces the other.

14 – Leadership is a combination of the genetic and the learned.

16 – leadership involves a hierarchy (for example, like an organizational chart within your company).

17 – Leadership requires a high level of experience.

21 – Being a leader requires training and education.

22 – Leaders can be easily created.

26 – Being a leader first requires that you have “power” over other people.

30 – Leadership is mutually exclusive; one person leading excludes others from taking a leadership role.

39 – Leaders emerge based on unidentifiable factors (in other words leadership is a mystery).

Q-Sort 1 versus Q-Sort 2 Matrix - comparison of agreed with and disagreed with statements (light shading indicates commonalities between Q-Sorts, dark italicized shading indicates a dramatic change⁷ between Q-Sort administrations). 40 statements are represented (4 from each of the 5 participants) with some duplications (i.e. – statement 26 was ranked 5 times).

Q-Sort #1:

Q-Sort #2:

Statement #	# Agreed	# Disagreed		Statement #	# Agreed	# Disagreed
1		x		1		x
2				2		x
4	xx			4	xx	
6	x			6		
7	x			7	x	
10				10		x
11		x		11		
13		x		13		x
14		x		14		
16				16		x
17		x		17		
21		x		21	x	
22				22		x
24	x			24		
25	xx			25	x	
26		x		26		xxxx
28	x			28	xx	
30		x		30		
33				33	x	
39		xx		39		
42	xx			42	xx	

⁷ Dramatic change is defined as a change of more than one ranking.

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