Chapter 6
Paradoxes of Subjectivity and Authority

The themes of truth and power permeate each of the paradoxes distilled from my empirical work and theoretical interpretation. Those grouped as *paradoxes of subjectivity and authority* relate particularly to the *use* of truth as a form of power (Foucault, 1988, p.107) to work directly on the soul of the principal by shaping principal authority and subjectivity. While the use of 'authority' does not discount the legal responsibilities that legitimise the principal's representative function, the focus is mainly on the performative acts of authority and the 'legitimate resources' they provide (Haugaard, 2012, p. 73) in constituting the principal as a figure of authority in schools within particular social and political limits. In the systemic arrangements within which my study is situated, the circulation of power between central policy-makers and the principal is vitally important in bestowing and sanctioning preferred subjectivities. More pointedly, the regimes of truth that are given expression in prominent discourses form a political incitement for principals to recognise and shape themselves in these discourses.

In effect, principals derive their authority by speaking inside of these claims to truth and by understanding the limits to their authority imposed by a necessity that their 'practices count as valid in the eyes of others' (Haugaard, 2012, p. 74). As Ball (2015) notes, the 'crucial point is that subjectivity is the point of contact between self and power' (p. 3). It is this productive function of power at a macro-political level that forms the basis of the first of the paradoxes in this chapter: *the paradox of politicised subjectivity*. This paradox works against dualistic conceptions of the principal subject as constituted either through 'subjectivation and interiorization of domination' or 'emancipating action based on free will' (Rebughini, 2014, p. 2). Instead, it suggests that complex relations of power create a permanent tension between forces of constraint and emancipation. In fitting the formation of the principal subject to a distinctly post-structural account of structure and agency, this paradox reveals the discursive forces shaping the principal as both oppressive and productive and speculates on subjectivity as a site of struggle and resistance.

This pervasive and influential paradox is further expounded through (1) *the paradox of system membership* which develops from conflict experienced by principals

C. Dolan, *Paradox and the School Leader*, Educational Leadership Theory,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3086-9_6

between system and local loyalties and (2) *the paradox of gender identity* which identifies how managerialist conceptions of leadership held in neoliberal policy discourses confound calls for a more diverse principal membership.

The authority of the principal is also subject to the micro-political dynamics of the school. While the legislative positioning of principals suggests a form of 'licensed autocracy' (Ball, 2012, p. 80), the social and political complexities of local execution mean that a different set of power relations are also in play which impose different controls and variables on principal authority. The other paradoxes identified in this chapter – *the paradox of team belonging* and *the leader/follower paradoxes* – while still acknowledging the powerful systemic influences on the principal render as paradoxical some of the local forces that appear to constrain and emancipate principal authority.

To reiterate, from my segue into this work in the previous chapter, my use of a paradox lens is not directed to putting a different normative truth up against the status quo. Rather, it is to interrupt and counter the prevailing truth in ways that raise pertinent and often neglected questions about principals and their work, and which reveal principal subjectivity, not as a fait accompli, but as a site of political struggle.

The Paradox of Politicised Subjectivity

The paradox of politicised subjectivity provides a broad schema for the relations of power in which principals are enmeshed and, as such, underpins many of the other paradoxes in this chapter and the two which follow. It relies on Butler's interpretation, in the *Psychic life of power* (1997), of Foucault's work on the productive function of power and its implication in the process of subject formation. School principals may understand and feel the oppressive effects of power exercised from above and outside. However, the very power that pushes down on principals and asks for them to submit to external demands is, paradoxically, the power on which principals depend for their authority and identity and which they 'harbor and preserve' (Butler, 1997, p. 2). Butler describes 'a fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency' (p. 2). As Rob, principal at Heatherbank School, observes:

> *I think my work is, in large effect, determined by the system and the system's expectations just follow.*

In this paradoxical arrangement, the principal appears to be afforded some power to act. However, it is not expressed as unencumbered choice, but rather set against the rules and structures that work to constrain and contain it or, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006) say of Butler's account, 'the subject is never fully determined by power, but neither is it fully determining' (p. 32). Such an understanding guards against idealised positivist readings of individual agency and, instead, takes principals and their work as discursively constructed within the inherent tensions and complexities of 'politicized subjectivity' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 32).

Certainly, participants in my study expressed a familiarity with a type of power that Butler says 'subordinates, sets underneath and relegates to a lower order' (p. 2). Belinda, principal of Lawson School, notes that:

> *The power of the centre just swells and often at the expense of the school. The role is being described to me, imposed on me – they are imposed roles that are not connecting necessarily to resources at the school site, to students and staff.*

Sasha, the Sullivan School principal, alludes to the ontological struggle brought on by this pressing influence from the outside:

> *I think we compromise in many ways right from what we believe a good education is through to some of the procedures that we are expected to undertake. Principals are required to present themselves as other than their real selves. The principal has to be careful how they present themselves because they are 'performing', 'following a process', to 'achieve an outcome' to 'resolve an issue'.*

In one extended response, Imogen, the principal at McCullough School, described the intervention of a central office policy directive into a very sensitive issue that she was trying to manage within the school. She said that the requirement to use form letters and to follow a particular set of procedures not only unnecessarily raised levels of staff and community disquiet and 'had the media at our door' but also put her in an unenviable position of feeling she was not acting in the best interest of her school. She concludes:

> *I wasn't able to actually follow my true values and support the staff member. I was responding as a bureaucrat and representing the department, so I felt that there was genuinely a compromise in that situation.*

Each of these examples depicts the principal as not fully enclosed, but already constructed, by power (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). Phillips (2006) provides deeper insights into these arrangements, describing the 'self' as:

> crafted and re-crafted out of the points of identification provided in the exterior fields of power and knowledge. These points of identification, in turn, provide symbolic anchors by which a subject is moored, at least temporarily, into a particular subject position within which they become identifiable and intelligible in terms of the broader formation of discourse.

A prominent feature of this discussion, so far, has been the power of the authoritative voice and the interpellation of a principal who answers the call to comply and submit. However, politicised subjectivity, when understood in its pardoxy, involves more than a 'hailing'[1] (Althusser, 1971) of the principal subject. Rather, as noted in my analysis of the policy discourses of neoliberalism, the dispositif of discursive and nondiscursive forces acting on principals requires and forms particular technical 'mentalities' that are not usually open to question by those who use them.

[1] In his oft-quoted metaphor of *interpellation*, Marxist and Marxist critic Louis Althusser understands the subordination of subject as the effect of the authoritative voice that hails the individual. Butler (1997) provides a useful critique of Althusser's interpellation (pp. 5–6, 95–96).

After Foucault (2008), conditions of neoliberal governmentality involve the *conduct of conduct* penetrating deeply into the lives of principals to create an expectation that they not only submit to being governed but also submit to lending a hand to the mode of governing to which they are subjected. Their 'agency' under these conditions is cast in an interdependent relationship with their subjectivity. It is found in the efforts of principals to seek in themselves qualities such as agility, flexibility and enterprise and in the way they take responsibility for their own choices, expertise and susceptibilities and watch, measure and audit the value they return to their schools. In short, their agency is derived from their efforts to govern themselves.

Championing of principals as agential and transformational – for example, in the centrality of their positioning in the school effectiveness movement – tends to obscure the power relations that underpin their compliance and submission and which entreat their self-governance. This is especially evident in interview data collected from non-principal research participants in response to questions about the role of the principal. The following interview excerpts are offered as examples of my observation of the generally apolitical and unproblematic quality of non-principal responses.

> *I believe that the first role is to implement central office policies. Then, working down from that would be curriculum, making sure that the curriculum is developed within the school, that the safety and wellbeing for staff and students is developed; that's bullying, occupational health and safety, sexual safety, and then parent communication, and increasingly, there is accountability. (Gillian, Heatherbank School)*

> *My understanding [of the role of the principal] would be that when there is a policy push from head office and they want it in schools it is Janet's job to ensure that the school is implementing that policy. (Bernadette, Caldicott School)*

These responses suggest that the application of the *paradox of politicised subjectivity* necessitates critical work that surfaces and examines how power operates to produce principal subjectivity, and a constrained form of agency, and the extent to which it forecloses other opportunities for freedom and autonomy. It describes, in its simultaneity and the interrelatedness of its parts, a fundamental shift from sociology's traditional structure versus agency debate and, more particularly, a permanent separation from the idea that agency is a free-floating quality that individuals apprehend and use (see also Clarke, Bainton, Lendavi, & Stubbs, 2015, p. 57).

This paradox locates the principal inside of their political surroundings and, concomitantly, suggests the possibility of a shifting and unpredictable relationship between the principal and the situation in which they are held. Principal identity, in this reading, moves away from any ontological notion of innate or fixed qualities and opens spaces for the articulation of some other altered versions of the principal subject. It is at this juncture that possibilities for what Rebughini (2014) describes as 'marginal emancipation from the inevitability of the processes of subjectivation' (p. XX) emerge. These possibilities will be pursued in more detail in the conclusion to this chapter.

The Paradox of System Membership

The paradox of system membership draws quite directly from the previous account of *the paradox of politicised subjectivity* and from Butler's (1997) interpretation of subjectivity as originating in entreaties to submit to external demands. In these arrangements, deep contradictions arise from centralised attempts to describe to each of the tiers in the hierarchy their need to see their work in a broader system-wide context. For principals, the paradoxical qualities of system membership originate in the uneven power distributions and contradictory demands that mark processes of communication, consultation, line management and accountability. Starr (2014) points out that 'accountability systems do not allow school leaders to appraise or comment on the performance of those above them in the systemic hierarchy'. She says that this is an example of the way school leaders are pushed to the outside of a core-periphery power model which 'assumes power differentials between leaders and followers with decision-making authority at the top' (pp. 230–231).

Paradoxically, in the system in which my study is situated, this hierarchical model is downplayed in favour of claims about democratic and consultative qualities that are, in turn, used as 'pastoral pedagogies' (Hunter, 1994) to discourage ambivalence and create expectations of loyalty and support amongst principals.

The plural qualities of *the paradox of system membership* appear to gain prominence when the principal's membership of the broader system is brought into conflict with local commitments and loyalties, for example, in the implementation of policy that may be deemed a poor fit to local needs. In fieldwork, strong evidence was provided of an already well-developed paradoxical understanding of principal membership of the broader system. Interview data from principal participants described both their commitment to working within a broader system and their feelings of indifference, disappointment and resentment towards particular policy directives and central office compliance requirements.

Rob, the principal of Heatherbank School, describes an alignment between his school and the broader system and the way membership of the system evokes the notions of being one of a team:

> *We talk about teams, well we're part of the team. The team is the system. It's the public education system. I suppose we can't get away from the fact that we are a public school and we are part of a big system, and that system has its structures and has its expectations of its schools and of its school leaders. We have a governance structure that also is cognisant of those responsibilities that the principal has to the system and to the public purse.*

Other principals provided more nuanced accounts about the risks in being part of a broader system and of meeting its expectations. Sasha, principal of Sullivan School, described her public disapproval of a requirement to undertake a centrally sanctioned school review process that she considered of little or no value to her school. She claimed that the only rationale provided was that 'you're the only one in the region that hasn't done it' and that her reason for eventually proceeding was linked to her personal friendship with the person asking her to comply, rather than

finding any new merit in the process. Janet, principal of Caldicott School, followed up on Sasha's story by describing the risks of speaking back to policy directives that are ill-suited to local needs:

> *People who publicly take risks like that are either that kind of personality or they're close to retirement! Which is true, we know that and we rely on colleagues who are close to retirement to have a louder voice. It's helpful to the masses if those that don't feel they are so much at risk can have a loud voice.*

The themes of risk and vulnerability that emerged in interviews with principals highlighted the paradoxical nature of systemic claims about democracy and consultation. Three of the principal participants explicitly mentioned how it was safe to provide certain perspectives in the context and setting of my research that they would not provide in hierarchically arranged professional settings.

However, this tension between system requirements and local needs can also be *obscured* by authoritative voices located further up the hierarchy providing directives to principals to act in particular ways. In these circumstances, principals may utilise the official, mandatory and prescriptive qualities of the directive to relieve the immediate anxieties of local dissonance (Storey & Salaman, 2010, p. 57). While this 'only acting on orders' style of resolution may provide short term relief, it is unlikely to resolve the antinomy that continues to reside in conflict between the needs of the broader system and those of the local school. Moreover, this depiction is not just of claims and expectations from the centre imposed on the unwitting principal. It also involves the work that principals do on themselves to align themselves with the system and to derive their authority from this alignment. In something approaching what Ball and Carter (2002) describe as 'the *external alliances* repertoire' (p. 558, italics in original), principals seek self-legitimation through their relationships with others closer to the centre as a way of gaining specialist knowledge that reinforces their position in local power relations. The presence of the principal's self-made alliance with the system and the benefits that accrue from this is evident in the following teacher observation:

> *Also they are like the captain of a ship because they can read the environment. Often, organisations like departments don't get a read on boots on the ground of the location, while the principal has that contact as well as the connection with the system. I think that's the principal's job to then put that all together to create a functioning work place. (Darius, Lawson School)*

Later in interview, Darius notes how alignment with the system yields possibilities for enhancing the authority of principals when he observes that 'the principal gains collateral by working as a vessel or a medium between the system and their staff'.

Against these depictions of easy compliance and seductive alliances, it is important to acknowledge considerable evidence from my fieldwork of principal efforts to lead improvement and to become more effective in responding to the needs of their school, their students and the community. All of the principals in my study appeared cognisant of a range of situational variables in their own and their school's history and culture and sought to address these, for example, in efforts to use data to improve

teaching practice and learning outcomes, in trying to meet the needs of at-risk student cohorts and in attending to the broader social justice functions of schooling. Much of this work appeared to be conducted in a policy environment characterised privately as extrinsic and generic but, at the same time, embraced publicly by principals for its hierarchical dispersal of authority. What appears to be at work in this paradox of system membership is what Foucault (1997a) describes as the 'versatile equilibrium' of government, 'with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which impose coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by [her/] himself' (p. 154) .

The Paradox of Gender Identity

In the provocation discussion conducted with principal participants, Sasha, the principal of Sullivan School, in commenting on what she refers to as 'the leadership industry', says:

> *Don't get me started … a group of boring men that go around talking about their heroic, servant, transformational, moral leadership styles … sigh.*

While Sasha's input was ostensibly addressed to travelling experts who spruik their wares around schools and other educational settings, it also captures one side of an identity paradox that is derived from depictions of gender in school leadership. This paradox develops from a deep contradiction in the logic of the reigning discourse of managerialism that dominates current understandings of school leadership (see Chap. 4). Gill and Arnold (2015) claim that, on the one hand, there is general agreement that leadership 'needs to reflect current notions less implicated by the traditionally male dominant gender order and more in tune with gender equity' (p. 5). However, they go on to point out that this 'runs counter to the business-driven ethos of the new accountability with its press for heightened competition between schools and public listing of league tables which identify some schools as more successful and others less so' (p. 5).

As a result, the school leadership workforce, often championed for the diversity of its membership, paradoxically, confines individual leaders to a dominant neoliberal policy script and to following heroic and masculinist models for constructing their identities and performing their work. Grace (2000) asserts, as an important constituent of critical leadership studies, 'the recognition that the paradigms and discourse of educational leadership have been dominated by patriarchal assumptions' (p. 240). These assumptions, as a form of politicised subjectivity, were noted in my fieldwork in the routine privileging and marginalising of certain gendered perspectives in leadership. Sullivan School principal Sasha alludes to this routine when she says:

> *I'm sick of the five Ps, the four Ts and the thirteen Rs of leadership … it's all patriarchal. It's all done by men. I just don't relate to it.*

Sasha also describes how matters of gender identity are clearly at work in reconciling the 'directive and political' and 'very anti-democratic project' of central policy making with the work she is trying to do to 'settle' policy within a 'learning organisation' at school level. She describes conflict brought on by disparate aspirations as emanating from gendered views of leadership:

> *Men have led it [the making of policy]. The notion of leadership is a patriarchal construct.*

Less explicit references can be detected in the numerous metaphoric descriptions in field interviews of the principal as 'captain of the ship' and as 'company CEO'. Following Blackmore (2005), these references 'are more often than not premised around strong and entrepreneurial models of leadership more closely associated with masculinity than femininity' (p. 184). They not only highlight the way masculine assumptions about leadership are embedded in the managerial discourse but also suggest that principals are confined to certain 'identity categories' (Youdell, 2006) as they derive, validate and perform their authority from within this discourse.

According to Sinclair (2011), the narrow and prescriptive characteristics of managerial trends enforce particular understandings of how leaders look and who they should be. Sinclair says that, while men also feel these pressures, it is 'women leaders in traditionally male-dominated environments [who] experience particular pressures to produce non-threatening leadership selves'. Sinclair further contends the effect of this demand for particular types of leadership selves forces leaders, both women and men, 'in deep and self-disciplining ways', to become 'agents for maintaining the cultural status quo' (p. 511).

Applying a paradox lens to the contradiction between the gendered leadership preferences of the managerialist frame and the need to take account of the diversity of the leadership workforce helps restore conflicting possibilities. This lens exposes descriptions of school principals that use business and industrial metaphors, and their top-down, narrow and formulaic connotations, as one-sided and duplicitous. It suggests the need for leaders to become more reflexive about the power relations that invite them to preferred identities and to the work they do on themselves to secure their authority.

From the margins of managerialist discourse, *the paradox of gender identity* admits the simultaneous presence of voices that are currently repressed or underrepresented. I claim, at these margins, the possibility of a certain reworking of notions of autonomy and emancipation. The comments that Sasha provides here (and in her 'portrait' in Chap. 7) reflect the importance of active forms of self-fashioning as an antidote to (self)disciplinary forces of subjectivation. In the language of Foucault, they provide examples of technologies of the self (see Chap. 3) that transgress and speak back to technologies of domination. Importantly, in opening more imaginative possibilities in the ethico-political work of principals, expressions of critique and counter-conduct like those that Sasha provides – and which *the paradox of gender identity* seems to invite – point to a need to surface more diffuse and specific ways in which principals might work on themselves and activate

'Foucault's idea that individuals exert a degree of autonomy in shaping their immediate conditions of existence' (McNay, 2013, p. 82).[2]

The Paradox of Team Belonging

While the language is in the formal and rational style of organisational studies, Lewis (2000) provides a useful and relevant summary of this 'identity/belonging' paradox that can be applied to the identity work of principals:

> Paradoxical tensions arise because actors strive for both self-expression and collective affiliation. Seeking to comprehend their roles in a group, organisation and/or community, members attempt to artificially distinguish themselves (e.g., differentiating personal competencies, occupational practices, or ethnic values). (p. 769)

Principals in my study appeared to experience this paradox at two different levels – as a personal conflict of identity and as a component of their personnel management responsibility.

Firstly, in terms of identity, principal participants seemed greatly enamoured with being 'one of the team'. Paradoxically, they also enjoyed depictions of themselves as leaders that pointed to their primacy and positional power, including metaphors of ship captains and company chief executives, and perceptions of their individual leadership as strong and decisive. Sasha, the principal at Sullivan School, confidently claims in interview that 'this school is absolutely run on teams', but, later in the same interview, says:

> *People need to know where the leader stands. I always make my position clear. This is what I want and if you don't like it, then you've got to convince me. It's like, 'We're going to do this consultation now'. At previous schools, you'd have the ones that sit out the back and go, 'How can we get rid of this and white ant that'. Then I would say, 'You remember democratic decision making? That's just hierarchical rubbish'. I'd say to them, 'Look this is what we'll go with, but we'll consult … we have to do it by this date and if it's not decided by then, I'll decide it'.*

Team membership and collaborative work permeated the rhetoric of principal participants and appeared to occupy large amounts of their time, both within and beyond the school. They provided various expressions of their team commitment, for example, in preferences for distributing leadership work, in championing the achievement of various individuals and groups in the school, in having an open-door policy and in looking after the wellbeing of colleagues.

Several expressed a dislike for a vocabulary that signified their power and control and a preference for descriptors such as 'influential' and 'collaborative'. These expressions appeared to denote the presence of a form of pastoral power, with

[2] McNay's (2013) *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* works at the conjunction of Foucault's practices of the self and feminist theory to provide insights into notions of gender identity, power, subjectivity and autonomy that greatly exceed those that could be gleaned from my empirical work.

principals preferring to 'shepherd the flock' towards desired practices and behaviours rather than giving directions founded on the designated authority of their position. Rob, from Heatherbank School, in response to a question about the power of the principal, seems to allude to this pastoral function when he eschews references to his personal power in favour of what he describes as 'the power of influence, the power of facilitation, the power of enablement' (see *Portrait: Rob – The Principal as 'Captain of the Ship'* later in this chapter).

Multiple group permutations meant that the principals in my study were involved in committees, working parties, consultation groups, professional networks and learning teams. These were formed within and across schools, schooling sectors and the broader system. Imogen, principal at McCullough School, lamented the amount of time spent in meetings, saying 'they just go on and on and on' and then asked rhetorically, 'but have I really been present for staff and students and community?' In interview, several teachers commented on the mystery and frustration associated with the assorted involvements of the principal and made links to issues of workload, availability and an apparent lack of 'payoff' back to the school. The following are offered as three examples from a bigger pool:

> *I think sometimes it seems to me that they get spread a bit thin, and those of us further down the food chain get an opinion that they're not doing enough and yet when you stop to think about they've got to be here and there and doing this and that, it's just not physically possible to put as much time into everything as we'd probably like them to. (Angela, Heatherbank School)*

> *I think there's a tug of war, because I think what the principal wants is to be embedded within their own school and to be productive within that school, but there are these other constraints all the time and expectations that they are attending various meetings and even professional learning days where Belinda has said, 'It's an expectation. I have to go'. (Ellie, Lawson School)*

> *There is an expectation that the principal be seen. To be visible at events that are deemed appropriate even if not necessarily useful. Sometimes it will be networking or being visible as opposed to being productive. (Tesia, Lawson School)*

Implicit in these descriptions is 'the tenuous and often seemingly absurd nature of membership' (Lewis, 2000, p. 769) as principals feel compelled to displays of willing participation in groups and at meetings where they may feel disconnected and irrelevant. In my fieldwork, principal ambivalence to team membership was most obvious in sentiments expressed about the centrally mandated system for grouping schools into *partnerships*. Opinions about being a secondary school principal representative in a partnership related to a lack of consultation, the contrived nature of the grouping, excessive time demands and failure to establish a clear purpose. Two principals contrasted the unsatisfactory qualities of partnership membership with the productive, relevant and collaborative opportunities yielded from membership of a self-formed and self-managed alliance of local secondary schools.

Using Lewis' (2000) description of this identity/belonging paradox, it becomes possible to interpret various displays of ambivalence and enthusiasm by principal

participants for their collaborative commitments in terms of the opportunities they can derive from each to both express their individual worth and find a purpose that is personally useful. Such an interpretation speaks to the identity tension founded on the principal's desire to distinguish and assert themselves individually while simultaneously displaying loyalty and allegiance to the group.

One interesting, if somewhat narrow, depiction of this two-sided feature of principal identity is in the designation of the senior team of leaders as the 'principal team' in three of the schools in my research. While at pains to point up the democratic and equitable qualities of such groups, principal participants were also comfortable with the implication that other leaders work from their lead and are untroubled by any suggestions of paternalism or hierarchy in the choice of title. This interplay between individual and group is captured in Imogen's description of her work with McCullough School's leadership team:

> *Whilst I'm leader of the staff, I'm also leader of the leaders, so I have a big responsibility in working with our leaders, particularly to ensure that we do support our whole school community and ensure that our students do achieve educational outcomes and, of course, with a focus on wellbeing as well.*

The second expression of this paradox takes the clamour of the individual desire for distinction and a strident preference for teamwork as competing interests in the everyday work of principals in what is variously described as 'human resource management', 'personnel management' or simply 'staffing'. Analysis of my observation and various interview data shows that principals, as part of this responsibility, are concerned to establish, manage and sustain a wide range of groups within their schools. Group membership, whether derived from mandatory or voluntary participation, is lauded not only as a vehicle for accomplishing change and improvement but also as creating a sense of loyalty and belonging. Accordingly, as evidenced in many observations in the field, principals are regularly engaged in public and private affirmations of the work of individuals within these groups, seeking updates on progress from group leaders and resolving conflicts and problems associated with group work. While all the principals in my study made reference to the importance of this work, the structural and interpersonal complexity, from which its paradoxical qualities materialise, are perhaps best captured in Janet's description of planning for improvement at Caldicott School:

> *I think one element of that is about the distribution of the leadership as well, so we have our governing council, and we've got our principal team and our learning leaders and our student services team. So all of our middle managers are involved in that work. And they are involved in all of our improvement and accountability processes, as are all of our teachers. We have a whole set of line managers who are people in designated leadership positions but that's not to exclude people who are leaders in their own right, as a teacher leader or whatever.*

By considering its paradoxical qualities, such smooth and positive depictions of team belonging can also be viewed as potentially problematic and exclusive. Here, a paradox lens interrupts the unambiguous regard for the power and importance of teams to reveal how the desire of individual to 'seek both homogeneity and

distinction' (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383) creates new ambiguities and conflicts. Using my fieldwork to illuminate this theoretical perspective surfaces questions about whether principals' altruistic reasons for participation may disguise motives of self-interest and personal advantage and raises issues, for example, about the uneven contribution of individuals, the symbolic and perfunctory components of membership and the inherent jealousies, competitions and squabbles that interrupt perceptions of smooth order. It also interrupts the logic on which teams are founded and publicly championed, thus revealing the role that membership plays in excluding those not deemed suitable and enhancing the status and personal ambition of those who 'make the cut'.

Leader/Follower Paradoxes

Leader/follower paradoxes related to principal authority are revealed by problematising a simplistic interpretation of school leadership as a top-down practice of control and coercion carried out by formally designated leaders, with followers rendered as docile and powerless. This dichotomous thinking perpetuates the idea of clear separation between leaders and followers and, in the asymmetry of its construction, fails to notice the active and influential role that followers play in constituting the leadership identity of principals. Mac, from Caldicott School, is clear about the dangers of the unfettered embrace of top-down leadership:

> *I don't like this model, this notion of giving more power to principals. I think it's a ridiculous notion. I mean, you know, there's a lot of ships that have sunk out in the ocean because nobody's prepared to actually say to the captain, 'the ship is sinking'. Now, you know, a school has got to be seen to be a community. The principal has an important role within that community, but the principal shouldn't be seen to be the captain of the ship, if you know what I mean.*

Niesche and Gowlett (2015), working from Foucault's conceptualisation of power, note that '(t)he principal is caught up in a circuitous set of power relations' where they are on the one hand the principal and leader who shapes the conduct of others but, on the other, are subject to 'complex sets of power relations from various sets of stakeholders and groups' that shape their conduct (p. 376). Evidence from my fieldwork suggests that influential amongst these stakeholders are a group that might be characterised as 'followers' – including other designated leaders in the school, teachers, support staff and students. In support of this interpretation of the multidirectional workings of power, Collinson (2005) emphasises the importance of 'followers' practices' claiming that 'they are frequently proactive, knowledgeable and oppositional' (p. 1419).

Implicit in thinking of followers as 'knowledgeable agents' (Collinson, 2005, p. 1422) is the idea that power is not just the province of the principal and other designated leaders. However, abundant images of heroic and visionary individuals feed favoured constructions of leader identities and what Roberts (2009) describes as a 'fictional belief in the self as an autonomous entity' (p. 967). This leader-centric

focus not only brings the leader/follower bifurcation into sharper relief but also overlooks the power and importance of followership. Principals are imbued with leadership identities that are individualistic, autonomous and heroic but, paradoxically, are dependent on the perceptions, 'projections and fantasies' (Sinclair, 2011, p. 510) of followers to endow an identity as leader upon them. This first *leader/follower paradox* operates in and on the broader milieu of principal 'identity work' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

As already noted at length, much of this work is bound up in the subjectifying power of discourses or, as Sinclair (2011) describes, 'the political and discursive processes by which manager and leader identities are manufactured, controlled and occasionally resisted' (p. 508). However, as the macro-political work of dominant discourses presses and cajoles principals into particular subjectivities, micro-political local and personal forces that directly implicate followers are also in play. Principals bring what Thomas (2009) refers to as the 'element of choice and intentionality' (p. 169) in shaping perceptions of themselves and their work in front of followers. Extending this idea, Sinclair (2011) describes how leaders manoeuvre the well-known 'characters and metaphors' of leadership 'to provide consistency to their conflicting leadership experiences' (p. 508). From my field observation of principal/follower interactions, this work is not just about a personal attachment to a preferred identity. It is also performative work that is designed to be recognised and admired by followers and even to present the principal to followers as 'water tight attractive' (Sinclair, 2011, p. 508). In my field data, qualities such as empowerment, collaboration, approachability and mutual respect appeared prominent markers of this local identity work. These qualities were consistently and publicly displayed by principals and widely noticed, cited and admired by followers.

The importance of this *leader/follower paradox* affecting principal identity lies in its explanatory and interpretive functions related to power. It reveals something of the circularity of local power relations and a 'micro-political conundrum' (Ball, 2012, p. 82) which has the principal caught in the tension between their own attachment to versions of themselves and their vulnerability to the opinions of others (see Collinson, 2006, p. 182). In this dynamic, a further paradoxical quality emerges when principals, in their attempts to fashion their true and stable leadership selves – and thus render themselves as 'authentic' leaders – must take account of the power of followers to endorse, modify and reject their performed identity. Paradoxically, this identity work seems more likely to reinforce the very ambiguity and insecurity they are trying to overcome.

These leader/follower paradoxes about identity also warn against a rush to recognising the practices of principals as a form of democratic leadership. Rather, ethnographic observations noting the express preference amongst principals to be seen as collaborative rather than autocratic leaders, frequent and meaningful principal interactions with other staff and displays of personal qualities of approachability, friendliness and warmth, while serving multiple purposes, are perhaps most productively understood as a form of pastoral power directed to courting and mobilising followers and to the securing of the principal's preferred leadership identity. This interpretation is captured by Ball and Carter (2002) when they describe how teachers are

'subject to the charismatic gaze' of leaders who 'project a charismatic identity in order that they get results … in terms of staff commitment, motivation and empowerment' (p. 564).

In this performance/audience consideration of the roles played by principals and followers, another *leader/follower paradox* emerges from observations of a strong attachment that some followers develop to this implied hierarchical arrangement. While principals were seen to actively promote ideas associated with shared and distributed leadership, collaboration, teamwork and flatter leadership structures, many followers paradoxically appeared to embrace certain forms of subjugation and a desire to have their 'psychological needs' met (Child, 2009, p. 502) within the existing hierarchical order. While Gordon (2011) describes 'organizational antecedents and meaning systems' that hold the traditional leader/follower power relations in place (p. 199), my fieldwork also revealed how the micro-politics of hierarchical power is utilised by followers to actively secure a particular identity within the school.

Follower identity strategies founded in existing hierarchical arrangements – which seem to partner logically with aforementioned principal identity strategies – appear to be undertaken, in part, to allow claims of diminished follower responsibility and to apportion ultimate responsibility to the principal. For example:

> *If something goes wrong it's sort of their head that's on the chopping block to some degree because you're following directions from the principal. (Bobbi, Caldicott School)*

> *Given that the buck stops with the principal I think there isn't a single member of staff that doesn't think that a principal is powerful. (Oman, McCullough School)*

> *I guess we're trying to move away from that hierarchical structure. But to a certain extent, it exists. It's going to come back down to if something goes horribly wrong then ultimately it is the principal's responsibility. (Zac, Sullivan School)*

Beyond the pragmatic advantages of holding to a lower position in the hierarchy, and depicting the principal as in command, followers also appeared to readily embrace forms of compliance in the accordance with perception of principal authority based on superior knowledge, connections and skills. For example:

> *She just has a confidence about her and she knows what she's talking about. She's very well prepared. She seems to have always done a lot of research. She just knows things, and I value that. (Georgina, McCullough School)*

> *I think it is the knowledge. As we've been saying they're privy to so much information in so many different groups and so many different areas. They have a lot of knowledge about what's happening in the school, who's doing what, then within the department. (Laurita, Caldicott School)*

> *If there are points when we don't feel confident in what we are doing, it's very easy to go and see Janet and say, 'I don't really know how to do this' or 'I've got a bit of trouble working out how to best get this across to staff', whatever the issue is, she's very willing to discuss it with us and help us think it through. (Annabel, Caldicott School)*

The *leader/follower paradoxes* described reveal the importance of taking account of the micro-political environment within which principal subjectivity is formed. They refute notions of a docile and impotent follower contingent in order to reveal the constitutive importance of follower opinions and perceptions. In the bifurcated and, I would contend, outwardly deceptive relationship, they also reveal the vested interests of both sides in the maintenance of existing leadership structures. In this way, they open to scrutiny claims of more democratic ways of leading schools and allow in dissenting opinion about current hierarchical arrangements.

Portrait: Rob – The Principal as 'Captain of the Ship'

Rob is an experienced principal who has worked for several years at Heatherbank School, a large secondary school in a relatively affluent suburban community. Rob's descriptions of his role exemplify his beliefs about the centrality of the principal in the life of the school and the complex responsibilities that he assumes as principal. Here the idea of the 'primacy of the principal', discussed earlier as a central technology in excellence and school effectiveness discourses, is the discursive frame within which Rob makes several different claims about his role and his work. As his opening claim in interview, he says:

> *The principal is a complex job and I'm the bottom line. I'm the bottom line person. Everything falls to the principal, really. I suppose I'm the custodian of the school. I'm the driver of the school. The custodian, I guess means that I'm the representative for the … the public representative that looks after the school. In terms of being the driver of the school, I'm the person that ensures that all our policies, practices, and procedures are all up to speed and operating properly. I am responsible for the learning that happens. It's very complex.*

Rob's assertions about the uniqueness and importance of the principal, as reflected in his use of familiar leadership metaphors such as 'driver', 'custodian' and 'public representative', form a particular regime of truth emerging from popular discourses affecting school leadership. This claim is most often exemplified in my research in the use of a 'captain of the ship' descriptor which appeared the metaphor of choice for staff and community members seeking to reify and amplify the principal's role. It is also embodied in Hatcher's (2005) reference to principals as 'the decisive link' which speaks of a particular identity founded in the seductive concern of policy-makers for having principals secure the commitment and compliance of teachers (p. 253).

Rob also puts significant store in his leadership of the school's vision. He says:

> *I came to this school with a very clear vision for the school. That vision has been embraced by my leadership team and they have been wonderful in working with me to espouse that vision to the staff, the students, and the community.*

Rob's fascination with his vision-making work centres largely on its symbolic importance and on his capacity to use it to create a values-driven context to which

he and others in the school community would then feel compelled to respond. His efforts to recruit others to his vision also emphasise its claim to exclusiveness and the absence of any discursive struggle over competing plans and interests:

> *You come to the school and you espouse a vision, but you've got to win your community over and your community ultimately are the enactors of that vision and the enactors of that purpose. All the time, it's about taking every opportunity to reinforce the vision.*

As a truth regime in broader discourses of school leadership, much of this visionary work seems to adhere to heroic and charismatic representations, directed more to winning the commitment and belief of staff and other recipients than to tangible outcomes. This tendency for the principal's vision at Heatherbank School to operate more at an affective and sentimental level is supported by several comments made by staff. Michael does not provide any detail but claims, 'Yeah, the vision is massive, huge', while Serena is more pointed in saying, 'the best principals I've worked with are the visionary principals. They're not real good on detail but that's why you have leadership teams'. Even as Rob goes on to explain the meaning-making functions of his vision in everyday practice, the sense that his work is predominantly as 'the primary symbolising agent' (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 175) persists:

> *A day wouldn't go by when that vision or that culture that's related to how I see the school and how I want the school to operate, when we're not interacting in some way or another about the school's vision and its culture and its purpose. It has been about achievement and about kids doing their best, kids being successful. It's been a vision that has a very strong moral purpose and being very clear about the values under which we operate.*

Rob's discursive framing of his positional prominence and visionary qualities appears to indicate that he is a principal who is single-minded, decisive and comfortable at the top of the school's leadership hierarchy. Furthermore, it is suggestive of a power being exercised predominantly from the top down. Norbert, a member of the leadership team at Heatherbank School, supports this view of the principal when he says:

> *People do look to the principal as the powerful person, they will all look for direction. I've got to convince the principal before things will change.*

However, the balance of Rob's input suggests that his subjectivity is formed in a range of different and contradictory discursive regimes and that he is uncomfortable with power relations that are only expressed hierarchically.

Rob spends significant time working with others. His office is the site of almost continuous meetings, interactions with staff and parents and management of student issues. His claim, made in interview, 'that a lot of my work is about how I can get to know my teachers and my staff better' goes to a belief he regularly articulates about the importance of teamwork and collaboration. He uses his interest in working collaboratively with staff to clarify his ideas about how he uses power and how he sees it circulating through Heatherbank School:

> *I'd like to think it's more of the power of influence, the power of facilitation, the power of enablement. That's how I want to operate and that's how I think I model my work most of the time. There will be some people in a school this big who'll say, 'yeah, he's a principal,*

just telling us what to do all the time.' But I would think, if you talk with the leadership team, and particularly the executive team, yeah, we are always collaborating and they are the eyes and ears out there that are giving us the lay of the land. We're always communicating and collaborating.

In this account, and in others Rob provides about his support of staff professional development and classroom observation, his more benevolent collaborative aspirations continue to be framed within broader discursive truth claims about the centrality and control of the principal. The following comments of staff and community members at Heatherbank add further weight to this claim:

With the emphasis on the principal, the principal has got autonomy, the principal has got to be accountable; all of these things, there's expectations politically of a principal. It takes away …from the whole team effort of the school. (Gillian, coordinator)

So principals will direct how they want things happening in the school. And different principals have different ways of doing that. Some are very directive. Some are more team-engaging, where they inspire the team to come up with ideas that they then ensure are implemented and taken forward. (Clive, Governing Council member)

At various times in interview, Rob asserts the complexity that accompanies his 'bottom line' responsibility:

The biggest pressure for me is probably time and the increasing expectation on principals and principals' accountability and just the complexity of the job and having enough time to do everything.

Observations of Rob, his work environment and the competing priorities that form his daily routine provide additional insights into this complexity. It appears to arise in part from the accretion of diverse interests and responsibilities within the school that not only layer jobs one on the other but also position Rob as a central figure in providing guidance, leadership and organisation to many separate tasks. In addition, Rob notes the increased external pressures that are brought to bear:

Ultimately, I do what I do when I can do it, but yes, there are more requirements of the system now in terms of do this, do that, have it done by this date, and report to blah, blah, and blah. I do bash myself up sometimes about how I prioritise things. I do like to think that my priority is to my people, whether they're my staff or my students, first and foremost. If something is a little bit late that the system wants, inevitably it's because I've been dealing with personnel issues here in the school.

The picture of complexity speaks loudly to claims about the competing demands, tensions and contradictions inherent in Rob's work. It also further unsettles narrow conceptions of school leadership as 'instructional', 'transformational', 'visionary' and so on and opens the way for the more nuanced account that a paradoxical treatment of principal's work provides.

Analysis and Conclusion

The *paradoxes of subjectivity and authority*, in their various concerns with the science of subjection and with making intelligible different versions of the neoliberalised principal, fix the ground rules and map a good part of a contest over principal subjectivity. They describe how a 'general politics of truth' (Ball, 2015, p. 5) provides a beguiling invitation to principals to capitulate to power. Ontological in its reach, this invitation amounts to a rendering of the soul of the principal as fully disposed to being governed. De Lissovoy's (2016) description makes clear the target of this power:

> Power works on being itself; it constitutes the ontological conditions that set the parameters of subjectivization and consciousness … it is this determination of being that is power's central purpose and triumph rather than the particular form of reason and belief that follow and express this fundamental fact. (p. 83)

Just as the limits of principal authority are framed by the politics of truth that these conditions impose, so too are the possibilities for principals to use the power of conventional truths to fashion their authoritative selves. In this politically crucial dynamic, the principal is positioned as a subject of discourse who is also conferred some authority to be a 'user' of discourse – to speak and act within its discursive boundaries (see Bacchi, 2000).[3] Introduced in this chapter through *the paradox of politicised subjectivity*, these discursive arrangements were further explored in the *paradox of system membership* and could also be detected in the enticement to gendered performance of leadership in *the paradox of gender identity*. An extension of this subject/user bifurcation was also present in the various *leader/follower paradoxes*, with performative signifiers of principal authority derived from constitutive discourses shown to both rely upon and shape local follower responses.

Each of these paradoxes indicates both foreclosure on unfettered principal agency and the remaining possibility for principals to find some capacity to act within the very discourses that define and constrain them. In support of this interpretation, Phillips (2006) usefully describes this two-sided subjectivity as suggesting a 'kind of productive tension' between the subject's 'fluidity' and 'positioning'. He further claims that, through this tension, 'we are simultaneously limited and enabled by the discourse formations within which we operate and against which we, at times, resist' (p. 310). From this suggestion of productive ambiguity, I conclude by bringing a Foucauldian theoretical perspective to the *paradoxes of subjectivity and authority* to better locate available spaces for action and to give some substance to remnant agential opportunities.

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[3] Butler (1997) adds complexity to Bacchi's (2000) subject/user dynamic. She describes a type of *performative* agency for the user of a controlling discourses and notes a reversal in the appearance of power 'as it shifts from the condition of the subject to its effects' to give the impression of 'self-inaugurating agency' (p. 16). Niesche and Gowlett (2015) provide a useful explanation of Butler's process of performative re-signification and its applications in the field of educational leadership, management and administration (ELMA).

According to Peters (2004), the shift in Foucault's work from 'regimes of truth' (e.g. Foucault, 1980a, 2008) to 'games of truth' (e.g. Foucault, 1987) marked a change in emphasis 'on how the human subject constitutes itself by strategically entering into such games and playing them to best advantage' (p. 57). Foucault (1984) locates this shift in the:

> complex and multiple practices of a 'governmentality' that presupposes, on the one hand, rational forms, technical procedures, instrumentations through which to operate, and, on the other, strategic games which subject the power relations they are supposed to guarantee to instability and reversal. (p. 338)

It is in this instability and reversal of power relations that I propose a link between the conditions of self-government that neoliberal governmentality demands and a way of playing these games of truth that involves 'an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being' (Foucault, 1987, p. 113). This involves a practicing of liberty that takes shape as a diligent scepticism about the necessity of prevailing truths. It is the progressive formation, out of what Foucault (2007) describes as 'a sort of close combat' of the individual with her/himself, of a type of 'asceticism' that is incompatible with obedience and in which 'the authority, presence, and gaze of someone else is, if not impossible, at least unnecessary' (p. 272).

The notion of an individual ascetic, imposed on the account of principal subjectivity so far provided, opens the possibility that the 'free' ethical subject – currently tied to entrepreneurial, managerial and market discourses – might also be able to enter a different truth game and comport themselves differently. This entry of principals is to interrupt their 'will to truth' (Foucault, 1981) and have them think and tell a different truth about themselves. Reliant on the interventions of various technologies of the self (see Chap. 3), it is an entry that I intend to link to the ethical project of speaking back to power and to the possibilities for principals to be more actively and productively engaged in the inevitable conflicts they encounter.

Bringing this theoretical perspective to the oppositions and contests surfaced in the paradoxes described in this chapter, I argue, boosts their prospects as a critical resource for illuminating the struggle over principal subjectivity and for prompting a stepping back to consider principal authority in a freer space. As already noted, the ontological enclosure of principals in neoliberal times elicits a compliant response, with the unintended consequence of reinforcing the effectiveness and stability of the social forces of neoliberalism (see Haugaard, 2012). Against this formidable backdrop, principals' efforts to think and talk a different truth involves, in the first instance, an inside struggle against the constraints in which they build their existing systems of authority. It is a struggle directed to revealing how dominant truth claims obscure their social construction and, thus, prevent principals from seeing and testing more agential versions of themselves. As De Lissovoy (2016) notes, the problem is 'unwinding the human body and soul from the intimate clockwork of not merely the correct and commendable, but also the apparently self-evident and inevitable' (p. 75).

Using paradox, I contend, is part of a method for this unwinding. In the simultaneity and interrelatedness of its parts, its construction holds open both the doxa and its opposites to scrutiny. In its 'warrior topos' language (see Chap. 2), it draws upon the unfamiliar to unsettle, challenge and undermine the familiar. In its capacity to reveal and make sense of often surprising alternatives, it brings new epistemological possibilities at the margins of dominant discourses. This amounts to exposing a more even contest over principal authority and subjectivity by taking account of disparate and tentative showings of resistance, ambivalence and refusal provided by principals and other research participants and working these into a more substantial opposition.

How then to execute a move from a protest against the subjectifying influence of current truth regimes, to having principals entertain a different social ontology in a space beyond the limits of neoliberal best practice? An early clue to this move, I contend, is found in *the paradox of team belonging*, where the tendency amongst principals to direct their team involvement to enhancing their personal standing and power suggests, in its paradoxy, a need to find different ways of working together. Here, the paradox points to the potentiality of a new 'democratic horizon' (De Lissovoy, 2016, p. 24) at the intersection of various principal identities. It allows for the possibility of a multiplicity of principal authorities and for engagement in a different processes of democratic leadership practice and self-formation.

It is at this intersection that the ethical project of speaking back to power and of 'speaking differently about the truth' emerges as an opportunity 'to make oneself thinkable in a different way' (Ball, 2015, p.13). In turn, giving more coherence and substance to principal opposition shifts attention to Foucault's (2007) account of an 'immense family' (p. 202) of counter-conducts and to the activation of the 'will' and 'practices of freedom' as tactics in loosening the hold of governmental power. Undeniably, such a project also entails careful consideration of the dangers of a 'certain risking of the self' which Butler (2001) claims, after Levinas, as 'a sign of virtue' (p. 22) but which, according to my field data, remains a formidable barrier to the propensity of principals to resist established truths.

The claims for paradox made to this point, in all likelihood, already exceed the reach of the resource created by using a paradox lens in this chapter. However, they do mark out the beginning of a more detailed argument to consolidate the practices of critique and counter-conduct and to appropriate the rhetorical function of paradox as warrior topos. This argument springs from Foucault's (1997b) account of 'the critical attitude' and the possibilities of facing head on the 'governmentalization' of society and individuals.[4] He describes this attitude as:

> both partner and adversary to the arts of governing, as an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting these arts of governing and sizing them up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them. (pp. 44–45)

[4] Later in the same work, Foucault (1997b) describes governmentalization as 'this movement by which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth' (p. 47).

Directed to 'the art of not being governed like that or at that cost' (Foucault, 1997b, p. 45), my extended use of critique and counter-conduct, in conjunction with a paradox lens, is concerned with how the subject might fashion new spaces of freedom and come to question and counter relations of truth, power and subjectivity in these spaces.

I will advance, over the next two chapters, a response to Belinda's claim, made in interview at Lawson School, that 'guarding of your ethical thinking' as a principal requires that you refrain 'from actually clearly saying what you think should be happening'. I propose, instead, a form of agonistic thought and practice that aims, after Foucault (1980b), to harness the 'amazing efficacy of discontinuous, particular and local criticism' and to discover 'the inhibiting effect of global, *totalitarian theories*' (p. 80, italics in original). This is a response that asks questions of authoritative truths, and the certainty with which they are maintained, and which uses paradox to plumb principal practice in order to reveal forms of authority that work beyond and against hegemonic representations.

The ontological reading of the struggle over principal subjectivity in this chapter should not suggest separation from questions of knowing. De Lissovoy (2016) describes 'an *epistemology of emancipation* … anchored in the lives of ordinary people and drawing on marginalized perspectives and struggles' (p. 131, italics in original). Translated to my research, this equates to a knowledge project that uses paradox to posit alternatives to the epistemological enclosures and impositions in current practice. It could be characterised, following Ball (2015), as 'a confrontation of the normative with the ethical' (p. 11) or, in more Foucauldian terms, a battle between the *will to truth* and the *will to know*. While this epistemological project was underway in this chapter, it is part of a more explicit focus on principal practice in policy work in Chap. 7.

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