Critical Leadership Studies: A Response to Learmonth and Morrell

By

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Introduction

Learmonth and Morrell (L&M) seek to emphasize the analytical primacy of managers and workers, and to argue that critical studies should be purged of 'the language of leadership'. Their Critical Management Studies (CMS) approach combines a labour process perspective with a focus on the performative effects of language. In my view, L&M's proposals advocate a return to a Marxist binary that tends to close down debate, all but precluding the possibility of a critical approach to leadership studies, and leaving little, if any, conceptual space for the study of leadership whatsoever. L&M also suggest that critical studies of leadership are not critical enough. Yet, paradoxically, their objections draw on highly conventional, voluntaristic and uncritical conceptions of leaders and followers.

In questioning L&M's arguments, this response re-states the value of critical leadership studies (CLS). CLS draws on a variety of perspectives to examine workplace power and identity dynamics in all their asymmetrical, shifting, intersecting and contradictory forms. A dialectical approach to CLS argues, among other things, that power in organizations is typically exercised through **both** management **and** leadership processes: not one or the other, but both. From this dialectical perspective (Collinson, 2005, 2011; Putnam et al, 2016), the conceptual conflict posited by L&M between management and leadership is at best unhelpful. The ascribed conceptual primacy they propose for the structural conflict between managers and workers seeks to resurrect a Marxist binary that limits analysis and raises many unresolved questions.

In challenging L&M's arguments, this response also re-states the value of re-thinking power and identity dynamics in dialectical, rather than dichotomous ways. This was the main theme of my 2014 article, a point ignored by L&M in their comments about this paper. L&M not only misrepresent and misinterpret some of my arguments, but also reproduce and exemplify this dichotomizing tendency. In what follows I argue that, rather than reproducing and reinforcing further dichotomies,

future critical work would be better served exploring the dialectical asymmetries, interrelations and intersecting practices of leaders **and** followers **and** managers **and** workers in all their ambiguous, paradoxical and contradictory forms.

Context

In order to appreciate the need for critical perspectives on leadership, and why the terms leader and follower continue to be relevant for critical projects, it is important to locate CLS in its conditions of emergence. CLS responds to the failure of mainstream leadership studies (MLS) to address important questions of power, control, asymmetries and inequalities. The mainstream literature represents the overwhelming majority of studies on leadership, most of which are informed by positivism, psychology and/or functionalism. In my view, it is this burgeoning conventional paradigm in leadership studies that critical work should be primarily concerned to challenge and go beyond. It is also by locating CLS in this context, that its value can be appreciated.

The critical focus on power and control both in labour process theory and CMS has made an important contribution to the study of management and organization. Yet, the primary emphasis here on class struggle has tended to neglect other key dimensions of organizational power and conflict. Martin (2003) observes that by prioritizing class inequalities critical theorists have simultaneously neglected sex, gender, race and ethnicity. I acknowledge my own past involvement in CMS, and its precursor the labour process debate (see e.g. Knights, Willmott and Collinson, 1985; Knights and Collinson, 1985). Yet, over time I became increasingly concerned about the unwillingness of labour process and CMS adherents to acknowledge that power asymmetries and control practices can occur in many different, intersecting ways within the social relations of organizations. There was a marked reluctance to address the multiple complexities of workplace power dynamics particularly in relation to subjectivities and identities, resistance and dissent, and gender and diversities. In the 1990s I also became concerned about the highly masculine, aggressive and confrontational tone of the “Organization and Control of the Labour Process Conferences”, where debates tended to polarize between those adhering to neo-Marxist and to Foucauldian perspectives.[1]

In more recent times I have come to recognize that CMS also routinely neglects and avoids any consideration of leadership dynamics. L&M's paper seems to be a further attempt by critical writers to dismiss the importance of leadership issues, and to justify this disregard.[2] By overstating the scope and influence of the managerial role, CMS typically downplays and analytically sidelines leaders and leadership issues. Although CMS examines key issues of power and asymmetry, it does not recognise that leadership dynamics are also important processes through which power, control and identity are enacted in organizations. Accordingly, whilst MLS tends to privilege leadership and downplay management, CMS typically inverts the dichotomy focusing on management and largely ignoring leadership.

Against this background, CLS examines **both** leadership **and** power dynamics. It acknowledges that, for good or ill, leaders exercise considerable power and influence in organizations. Their impact can be constructive and empowering and/or destructive and oppressive. Rather than closing down debates, CLS encourages a plurality of perspectives and a multiplicity of approaches and critiques (Collinson, 2011; 2014). It seeks to study organizational power dynamics by opening up new and innovative approaches.[3] This response critically evaluates L&M's central proposal to purge the language of leadership from critical perspectives.

Dichotomies and Dialectics

L&M contrast my 2014 article with one written 26 years earlier. One difference that L&M do not acknowledge is that the 1988 piece is an empirical study of humour and masculinity in a male-dominated shopfloor culture, whereas the 2014 article is a more conceptual paper that considers future possible directions for critical leadership studies. Most of L&M's comments, however, overstate the differences between the two articles and also contain important inaccuracies:

> "It is as if the 2014 version were addressed primarily to and written for so-called leaders.....all the Marxian-inflected rhetoric we find in the 1988 extract (e.g. 'obscure conflict'; 'hierarchical structure of status and power'; 'the polarization between management and shop-floor' etc.) seems to have disappeared – along with the terms manager and shop-floor worker. To our ears, these changes have the effect of significantly depoliticising the 2014 account. They make the critique less challenging to the powerful, with no sense of workers' voices coming through." (Learmonth and Morrell, 2017: ??)

Firstly, this statement fails to acknowledge that the two articles share a similar focus on the polarization between those in power, who I argue, are often distant and detached, from those in subordinated positions, who are frequently marginalized and silenced. Secondly, L&M's contention that the terms 'manager' and 'worker' have 'disappeared' in the 2014 article is just incorrect. This paper clearly and explicitly refers to 'managers' and 'workers' in numerous places.[4] Rather than seeking to replace managers with leaders (as L&M contend), the article is concerned to highlight the importance of critically studying **both** leadership **and** management, as the Introduction states: "CLS emphasize that leadership and management are often interwoven forms of organizational power and identity that are not as easily separable as is sometimes assumed' (2014: 37).

The paragraph immediately following the one quoted by L&M quite clearly uses the terms manager and worker in several places. It refers to the aforementioned shopfloor study to illustrate how distance and resistance can be reproduced in asymmetrical workplace relations:

> "For example, shopfloor workers in an engineering factory ridiculed the new US senior managers' statement that ''we are all a team together.'' Rejecting the corporate leaders' statement that the company's success was based on a shared team effort, manual workers argued that this emphasis on collaboration was contradicted by the way managers treated their labor as a disposable commodity. Viewing the US managers as insincere and manipulative, they constructed a counter-culture which privileged their own working class ''honesty,'' masculinity, and ''practical common sense'' that in turn informed their strategies of output restriction." (Collinson, 2014: 45).

This extract contradicts L&M's claim that the terms 'managers' and 'shop-floor workers' have 'disappeared' from the 2014 article. It also raises issues that are central to critical perspectives (managerial ideology, manipulation, resistance, commodification, masculinity and polarization). For writers who are concerned about language and its performative effects such inaccurate representations are surprising.

L&M's comment that the 2014 article is 'written for so-called leaders' suggests they have just not grasped what this paper is about. A primary aim of my 2014 article is to challenge the widespread dichotomizing tendency in leadership studies (e.g. transformational/transactional, leadership/management, and leaders/followers). In also highlighting the value of dialectical approaches for future critical research, the

article is clearly written for researchers (not leaders).[5] Dichotomization refers to the tendency to exaggerate conceptual differences whilst neglecting similarities, overlaps and interrelations. My paper argues that dichotomized thinking tends to privilege one side of an apparent polarity above the other, exaggerating its perceived positive aspects, whilst overstating the imputed negative features of the downplayed polarity. Dichotomization over-emphasizes difference(s), making excessive separations between distinctions, treating these as immutable polarities, and perpetuating unwarranted asymmetries within distinctions. In my view, L&M's paper exemplifies this dichotomizing tendency.

My 2014 article also argues that critical perspectives are sometimes characterized by a reverse dichotomization that reproduces a similar problem. In advocating a conceptual focus on management at the expense of leadership, L&M reproduce this binary inversion. Furthermore, my 2014 article argues that we can view dichotomization as part of an illusory search to avoid/eliminate ambiguity and paradox. A similar concern seems to inform L&M's proposal to replace the language of leadership with the apparent certainties of the structures of Marxism.[6] Yet, as the following section elaborates, the meaning of the terms 'manager' and 'worker' are not as self-evident as L&M seem to suppose, and the Marxist binary they advocate provides at best only a partial analysis of the multiple asymmetric and intersecting power and identity processes that typically characterize workplace dynamics.

'Managers' and 'Leaders'

Although L&M's main recommendation is to (re-)focus on manager and worker, they do not discuss the meanings of these terms. This raises a number of unexplored questions. For example, while L&M tend to treat 'management' as an homogenous entity, there are important horizontal and vertical differences within the function that need to be addressed particularly if a more critical approach is being proposed that examines power and conflict. This is the case even if we disregard the divisions between managers who are employed in competing organizations. Horizontally, within the same organization managers are typically differentiated between diverse technical areas, functions and departments, such as finance, marketing, sales, HR and production. Vertically, managers are differentiated by seniority levels, such as: supervisors, junior managers, middle managers, senior

managers, CEOs, owners of organizations and/or owner-managers. These various structural and hierarchical differences can be the source of deep-seated divisions and conflicts over power, control and identity within managerial hierarchies (Heckscher, 1995; Watson 2000). They can be further compounded by the individualizing effects of managers' competitive career ambitions (Grey, 1994).

Important struggles can therefore occur within and between managerial functions (Jackall, 1988). Although very important for critical researchers to address, such conflicts are likely to be missed and/or obscured by a Marxist binary that prioritizes the structural economic conflict between managers and workers. Moreover, these inter-and intra-managerial differences and hierarchies are one important reason why the language of leadership continues to be useful and relevant. The notion of leader(s) facilitates the identification of those at a structural level who occupy very senior hierarchical positions, who typically define and determine organizational direction and make key strategic decisions, and who often deliberately distance themselves from the everyday detail of organizational practices. It is therefore, I would argue, the language of leadership that is able to acknowledge how power and control are typically centralized and protected in contemporary organizations.[7] Relatedly, this recognition of hierarchical heterogeneity can also begin to tease out tensions, conflicts and ambiguities between leaders within and across organizations (e.g. Kerr and Robinson, 2011).

In addition to recognising the importance of differentiation within the leadership and management functions, I argue that critical analysis needs to consider areas of overlap and similarity in relation to workers, managers and leaders. First, particularly in a post-delayering era often characterized by the commodification and disposability of managerial labour, a simple structural distinction between 'manager' and 'worker' is more difficult to sustain. In contemporary organizations many managers seem to be treated as 'workers'. Their labour is closely monitored, evaluated, disposable and insecure (Collinson and Collinson, 1997). Second, informed by the recent popularity of distributed leadership, managers have been encouraged and trained to see themselves as leaders, and to enact and embrace leadership discourses, identities and practices - just as administrators were re-tooled in the vocabulary of management in the past.

Managers are now frequently evaluated on their capacity to demonstrate ‘leadership skills’.

This distribution of leadership thinking down the managerial hierarchy can have real effects on how people fulfil their functions, how they see themselves, how they present themselves to others and how people respond to them. Even at lower levels managers often attempt to enact some of the discursive practices of leadership they have been taught to value. This overlap between management and leadership, which can take many forms in contemporary organizational practices, further questions the dichotomising approach of L&M, who seem to assume that this can be defined as an either/or situation (i.e. that you are either a manager or a leader but cannot be both, sometimes at the same time). L&M seem unwilling to accept the possibility of multiple, simultaneous and overlapping identities.

Hence, rather than privilege either leaders or managers, critical approaches would, in my view, be better placed recognising that **both** are important in analysing the exercise of workplace power relations and identity constructions. Whilst I would agree that the concept of ‘leader’ needs further clarification, replacing it with an overly-homogenized term like ‘manager’ can obscure internal managerial hierarchies, differences, tensions and struggles. Recognising this heterogeneity opens up new ways of thinking about how, why and with what effects power, conflict and identity/ies are enacted in leadership dynamics, and about the contradictions and unintended consequences often contained in such processes. Relatedly, it also questions overly-deterministic conceptions of power relations. As Giddens’ (1979) argues in his notion of ‘the dialectic of control’: no matter how asymmetrical, power relations are always to some degree two-way and interdependent, albeit often in contradictory and paradoxical ways.

L&M criticise CLS for a lack of reflexivity. Yet, they seem rather unreflexive about their own use of Marxist language. In other places however, L&M eschew their critical discourse altogether and subscribe to mainstream conceptions of leadership categories. Their binary argument shifts from Marxist structuralism to mainstream voluntarism, as the following section elaborates.

‘Leaders’ and ‘Followers’

In criticising CLS for not being critical enough, L&M adhere to mainstream conceptions of ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’. Rather than take for granted such essentialist interpretations, I would argue that critical approaches are better served rethinking their situated meanings, especially in the context of power asymmetries. L&M argue that to use the term ‘leader’ (rather than CEO, manager or boss) is to collude in reinforcing “favoured and positive identities” and to support a unitary view of authority. This argument relies on and reproduces mainstream understandings of leaders. For example, Burns (1978) separated and elevated (‘positive’) leadership over (‘negative’) power wielding. He defined leaders as those who successfully mobilize followers to achieve a collective purpose by engaging their motives. ‘Power-wielders’, by contrast, were those who use followers for their own purposes. They utilize ‘brute’ power to achieve their ends. Burns’ argued that ‘brutal dictators’ should not be considered to be leaders: a view that has subsequently been very influential in MLS. Rather than remain wedded to this kind of excessively positive definition of ‘leader’ that all but precludes the study of power relations, it is preferable, in my view, for critical perspectives to disentangle the term from any ascribed and preconceived positivity.

Indeed this de-coupling of leaders from inherently ‘positive’ identities is central to CLS. It is precisely this kind of disconnection that I was concerned to develop in critiquing ‘prozac leadership’ and the excessively positive discourses that often characterize leadership dynamics (Collinson, 2012). It is also what Tourish (2013) outlined in his examination of the ‘dark side’ of transformational leadership (see also Tourish and Vatcha, 2005). This de-coupling has facilitated a large number of influential critical studies, such as those critiquing toxic, destructive and bad leadership (e.g. Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Schyns and Hansbrough, 2010; Kellerman, 2004), the (gendered) idealism of leaders’ heroic performances (e.g. Ford, 2006; Sinclair, 2007), and important work on the need to re-think leaders’ ethical and moral orientations (e.g. Ciulla, 2004). Many other critical studies of leadership have similarly challenged the tendency in MLS automatically to ascribe favoured and positive identities to leaders.

L&M also adhere to a highly conventional conception of followers. Certainly leadership infers followership, and there is a need to attend more closely to the meanings of follower and followership. However, it is problematic, especially for those espousing a radical critique, to revert to voluntaristic understandings when trying to dismiss the concept of followership. L&M argue that since many 'workers' are indifferent to (and others despise) their bosses, assuming workers are 'followers' of organizational elites seems not only "flattering to the managerial ego", but also "demeaning" and "insulting" to workers. The voluntarism that underpins L&M's arguments is expressed in their assumptions that (a) followers 'freely choose' to follow, and (b) if a respondent says they are not a follower then, apparently, they are not. A workers' self definition has to be accepted without further comment. For those advocating a critical/Marxist analysis such a voluntaristic understanding is again rather surprising.

By locating followers in their structural, cultural and economic context – the conditions and consequences of action - critical perspectives problematize voluntarism. Precisely because of the ways that power and control are typically reproduced in contemporary organizations, many employees may well have to 'follow' a strategic direction for their organization that is set and imposed by corporate leaders, even if they disagree with the selected path and even when it contradicts their self-identity as independent. Attachment to a view of self that emphasizes personal autonomy may make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to concede or accept that they are 'followers' in the sense of being required to implement decisions with which they disagree. But that does not hide the reality of top down forms of control, asymmetrical power dynamics, and the contradictory situations in which employees, workers, followers often find themselves.

It also highlights the importance of critically examining identity work in the context of power dynamics (Collinson, 2003). This in turn raises interesting questions. If someone denies they are a follower (say in a research interview or survey), does this necessarily mean that we should simply accept what they say as a full account, and leave it at that? Academics, for example, may claim that they are not followers in universities (as L&M explicitly contend), yet they/we are frequently required to 'follow' and implement initiatives in both HE generally and their/our own universities specifically with which they/we disagree. Self-identities are important to

consider, but they need to be located in the context of control strategies, asymmetric power relations and workplace cultures (Collinson, 1992). Indeed it is precisely because of this asymmetry that it remains plausible to view employees as one particular form of follower.

Some researchers advocate focussing exclusively on followers, others recommend avoiding the term altogether. Rejecting these polarized perspectives, I argue that the study of followership is an important element of a critical approach to leadership studies (Collinson, 2006, 2008). Rather than adopt a one-dimensional and voluntarist definition, critical perspectives would, in my view, be better served addressing the multiple possible situated meanings of followership, both as a concept and as a set of practices. Recognising the inherent ambiguity of the term opens up debates about a spectrum of possible follower types and behaviours.[8] The concept of follower carries a number of meanings in different contexts, including, for example: political supporters, disciples, fans (e.g. of sports teams and musicians), customers, fanatics, and even Twitter 'followers'. Within this broader range of possibilities, employees can be seen as a specific kind of follower who sells their labour to employers. In that sense employment can be treated as a particular form of commodified followership: one that is more contingent and constrained, and much less 'freely chosen'. This in turn also means recognising a much broader spectrum of possible follower agencies: for example, from deference, unquestioning loyalty, conformity and compliance to indifference, cynicism, disguised dissent and overt resistance. Just as managers (Scase and Goffee, 1989), leaders (Gleeson and Knights, 2008) and shopfloor workers (Collinson, 1992) can be reluctant, so too can followers.

L&M's mainstream and voluntaristic definition also informs their rejection of the idea that followers might engage in resistance. They argue that "someone who dissents and resists is surely (according to received English meanings) not a follower." Of course, if we define followership as freely chosen, then 'followers' cannot resist. The problem here is L&M's one dimensional, uncritical and self-fulfilling definition of followers. Presumably, it would also be possible to apply L&M's very literal argument to the term 'worker' in ways that similarly preclude the possibility of resistance. The "received English meaning" of the term worker literally refers to those who work, and thus **not** to those who withhold their labour. But self-

evidently, it is important to leave open the possibility that workers might withdraw their labour. In a similar way, it would seem reasonable to accept that followers can withdraw their followership. Indeed it is now recognized that followers do, and in some cases should resist by 'speaking truth to power' (e.g. Chaleff 2009, 2015). In my view there seems to be no logical or conceptual reason why, from a critical perspective, followers should be treated as incapable of resistance.

Furthermore, L&M's concern to replace follower with worker does not resolve the inherent ambiguities in these terms. In contemporary organizations the term 'worker' can convey different meanings, ironically including 'manager' in some contexts. L&M's proposal to replace the term 'follower' with 'dissenter' or 'radical' implies that all workers/employees do invariably engage in resistance. This is certainly not my experience of organizations generally or of shopfloor culture in particular (Collinson, 1992; 1999). One of the problems with a Marxist romanticism that imputes a radical and oppositional motive to **all** worker behaviour is that it simultaneously eliminates any discussion of conformity. Yet, conformity and its effects are arguably at least as significant as resistance in contemporary organizations. Hence, L&M's argument relies on another unhelpful dichotomy in which, on the one hand, 'workers' are deemed to resist at all times, whilst, on the other hand, 'followers' are viewed as unable to ever engage in dissent of any kind.

I would certainly acknowledge that the term follower, like leader, requires more conceptual and empirical work. But L&M's circular definition is so narrow and functionalist that it factors out any alternative possibilities. There is an irony here in using mainstream meanings to criticise CLS for not being critical enough. Indeed it is this adherence to conventional notions that can lead to the kind of obfuscation and denial of structural antagonisms about which L&M complain. A critical approach to leadership studies is more likely to problematize these categories in ways that render transparent the possible tensions, conflicts, ambiguities, contradictions as well as structural antagonisms in leader-follower dynamics, power relations and identities. Rather than try to eliminate these issues, we would be better served acknowledging and exploring them. Far from purging the language of leadership, we need to re-think these dynamics in much more critical and dialectical ways.

Conclusion

This response has rejected L&M's proposal to purge critical studies of the language of leadership. Whilst L&M contend that the terms leader and follower obscure power relations and de-politicise workplace relations, I argue that a critical approach to these concepts can shed light on the asymmetrical and hierarchical nature of organizational power relations, on those occupying senior organizational positions who exercise top down control particularly through executive decision making, and on those in more subordinated positions who often have limited capacity to influence the direction of their organizations. Critical approaches also recognise that, despite their subordination, followers can often find ways to resist. From this perspective contestation is central to situated leader-follower dynamics.

L&M complain that 'leader' and 'follower' are increasingly replacing 'manager' and 'worker' as the routine way to frame hierarchy within organizations. Disagreeing with this assertion, I argue that both leadership and management (and their inter- and intra-relations and tensions) are important issues for critical researchers to address. My 2014 article does not seek to replace management with leadership, as L&M contend. Rather it suggests that both leadership and management are important, outlining a both/and rather than either/or perspective. Furthermore, far from 'denying structural antagonisms', critical perspectives specifically examine the control practices, asymmetries, tensions and situated conflicts in leadership dynamics that heretofore have been largely ignored in MLS.

Some of L&M's arguments tend to rely on overly-simplified and one-dimensional images of 'oppressive' managers and 'heroic', 'class warrior' workers. The extent to which their proposals hark back to an era when apparently unambiguous class-based identities characterized many workplaces is illustrated by their reliance on examples of films from or about the 1950s and 1960s. L&M's suggestion that the term 'leader' would probably not have been used in the 1960s illustrates their view that the language of leadership is somehow a 21st century preoccupation. And yet, leadership is an idea that can be traced back to ancient times, whereas the concept of 'management' is very much a 20th century phenomenon, The discourse of leadership did not simply appear in the 21st century to justify the increased power and status of administrators or managers. It is deeply

embedded in the history of humanity, of central importance, for example in the Classical Greek writings of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates (Wilson 2016). In fact it is management as a professional occupation that is a comparatively recent phenomenon, emerging out of the separation of ownership and control in large-scale organizations during the 20th century (Mintzberg, 2008).[9] L&M's arguments reveal more about the authors' own Marxist preferences, than they say about CLS.

This is not to dismiss the potential analytical value of certain elements of Marxist and CMS thought for understanding leadership dynamics. For example, class inequalities, the commodification of labour and the ownership of the means of production are all important considerations in critically researching leadership dynamics and in developing CLS. Nevertheless, whilst Marxist materialist perspectives may be able to illuminate leadership dynamics (when applied in constructive ways), there are other important intersecting dialectics of power, control, asymmetry, and resistance that need to be addressed. Organizational struggles for power and identity dominance are enacted through many different processes. Workplace conflicts frequently take not merely economic, but also symbolic and cultural forms. Highlighting the importance of situated agency and subjectivity for understanding the reproduction of power relations and hierarchical structures, this approach points to the value of addressing multiple, intersecting and potentially contradictory dialectics in organizations, which the manager-worker binary does not consider.

There is a curious bipolarity running through L&M's arguments. On the one hand, they define leadership and followership in mainstream and uncritical ways. It seems paradoxical to dismiss CLS for not being critical enough by drawing on inherently conventional and voluntaristic definitions of leader and follower. In my view critical scholarship should be challenging, rather than reproducing such functionalist perspectives. On the other hand, L&M also advocate a Marxist binary and seek to replace all references to 'leaders' and 'followers' with Marxist categories (e.g. the structured antagonism between capital and labour, class struggle, alienation and exploitation), even quoting the Communist Manifesto in their Conclusion.

L&M's desire to purge the language of leadership[10] also seems to be inconsistent with their own use of these terms in some of their earlier publications.

Mark Learmonth has co-authored a book on 'Leadership as identity' (Ford, Harding and Learmonth, 2008), which seeks to contribute to critical studies of leadership. At Durham University Mark is also affiliated to the 'International Research Centre for Leadership and Followership' which explicitly prioritises in its overview "the critical role of the follower in the leadership process" (https://www.dur.ac.uk/research/directory/view/?mode=centre&id=548). On his website Mark encourages applications from doctoral students who wish to study leadership. Kevin Morrell has used 'the language of leadership' in some of his published work and has co-edited a Special Issue of *Leadership* (Mabey and Morrell, 2011). Perhaps it is for these reasons that, having heavily criticised others for using the language of leadership – very much the gist of their article – L&M then conclude by watering down their critique and acknowledging that such terms are difficult to avoid. Having criticised CLS authors for using the terms leader and follower, L&M conclude by acknowledging that perhaps the use of these terms is inevitable. Suffice it to say here, that this considerable dilution of their argument tends to contradict what preceded it.

To conclude, I would be delighted if there was no longer a need for CLS. But for CLS to outlive its purpose would require other critical approaches to recognise the importance of leadership dynamics in the study of power, control and identity in organizations. Whilst it is heartening to see that at the 2017 CMS conference, the organisers have accepted a proposal for a stream on "Critical Studies of Leadership: Critical methodologies and alternative spaces" (Schedlitzki et al, 2017), L&M's proposal to replace the language of leadership with a Marxist binary suggests that critical perspectives specifically on leadership are likely to be needed for some time to come.

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Notes

[1] Bidet (2016) argues that there are important potential synergies between Marx's critique of property and class relations and Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge relations in capitalist societies.

[2] Leadership as a topic is typically absent from edited collections that seek to showcase CMS. The general CMS neglect of leadership seems to be informed by the belief that the power of leaders is overstated, that studying leaders requires an individual level of analysis which should be left to social psychologists, and that critical research should focus on more collective categories of analysis like management. It is also sometimes suggested that by studying leadership per se, we are automatically validating and supporting those in power. In my view, by adopting a critical stance, CLS does not necessarily validate leadership, just as CMS does not necessarily validate management.

[3] Indeed with regard to leadership studies more broadly, Keith Grint and I launched the Leadership journal and established the International Studying Leadership Conference with the explicit aim of encouraging greater pluralism and supporting the development of papers from a larger number of academic disciplines, theoretical frameworks, cultures and countries, not just those adhering to mainstream or even more critical paradigms (Collinson and Grint, 2005). We have always sought to be inclusive, to open up discussions, and to encourage innovative thinking from a variety of disciplines and perspectives (see also Bryman et al, 2011; Collinson et al, 2011).

[4] There are numerous other references to 'managers' in my 2014 article, including in the two paragraphs preceding the extract quoted by L&M (Collinson 2014: 44). The Conclusion recommends that dialectical approaches focus on 'the simultaneous interplay between leaders, managers, followers, and contexts as well as on their ambiguous and potentially contradictory conditions, processes, and consequences' (2014: 47-48). The final sentence of the article discusses 'the theory and practice of leadership, management and organization' (2014: 49). Footnote 5 examines the possible pendulum effect in the primacy afforded leaders or managers within different economic and political conditions.

[5] It is also difficult to see how L&M can justify their assertion that in my 2014 article there is 'no sense of workers' voices coming through' when various empirical examples of workers' views are discussed.

[6] The notion of 'structure' also requires much closer consideration. Firstly, there are multiple structures to consider, as well as the ways these may intersect or be in tension. Secondly, structures shape and inform agency but typically not in deterministic ways (Giddens 1979). Structures are produced and reproduced through meanings, practices, relations and identities. Accordingly, there is a need also to consider the dialectical dynamics between structure, agency and practice. A more nuanced analysis recognises that structures not only constrain, but also facilitate agency and practices. Structure and agency are a medium and outcome of one another.

[7] L&M explicitly limit their analysis to a focus on the effects of language, arguing 'our intent is not so much to debate what leaders and followers are, but to show what the use of these terms does.' (Learmonth and Morrell: p.3). In my view critical scholarship needs to do both.

[8] In an early discussion of followership, Kelley (1992) challenged leader-centric perspectives by documenting a plurality of follower orientations and a spectrum of 'styles' of followership. In addition to 'exemplary' and 'conformist' followers, Kelley included pragmatic, passive and alienated followers.

[9] L&M argue that it is probably impossible to 'construct radical critique in the language of the powerful' (Learmonth and Morrell: p.11) thus implying, in my view mistakenly, that 'the language of management' is somehow free of such connotations of power and control. Moreover, rather than impute essentialist meanings to the terms management or leadership, I would argue that these can be, and indeed frequently are, interpreted in different ways in different contexts: hence the value of critical approaches to both leadership and management.

[10] The tone of L&M's criticisms seems excessive in certain places. For example, they criticise Collinson and Tourish (2015) for encouraging students to be more questioning in their thinking about leadership: "Collinson and Tourish end up encouraging students to see leadership and followership almost everywhere" (2015, p.581). Our point here was that encouraging students to make links between theories and experiences was a relatively helpful pedagogy. This included encouraging students to reflect critically on various theories of leadership. L&M's implied suggestion of indoctrination is disappointing and unfair. The only other implication I can draw from L&M's statement is that they do not believe that leadership processes occur in schools, workplaces and families.