Love and leadership: Constructing follower narrative identities of charismatic leadership

Ken Parry
Bond University, Australia

Steve Kempster
Lancaster University, UK

Abstract
Most extant research on charismatic leadership has an essentialist orientation that characterises it as leader behaviour, leader communication or follower dependency. Our approach is more discursively oriented. To research charismatic leadership, we used aesthetic narrative positivism, which undertook utilitarian as well as critical method. We examined followers’ implicit narratives of their lived experiences of charismatic leadership in organisational settings. We examined metaphors for this experience. Most respondents identified with positive affect, a form of love story; a minority experienced negative affect, especially anger; and some experienced both positive and negative emotions. We posit that if one adopts a certain identity within the context of a dramatic narrative, one might be attributed with charismatic qualities by followers. In this way, we suggest that charismatic leadership might be less a gift from God and more a ‘gift from followers’.

Keywords
Charisma, identity, leadership, love, metaphor, narrative analysis, followership

Introduction – putting the follower back into charismatic leadership
I see charismatic leadership like a favourite aunt. It is not someone extraordinary but someone who looks after me and who I look up to and respect. She is frustrating and perplexing, but I know she is always there for me. It might just only be my family, but, you know, it’s my family.

This research started as consequence of Ken working with a group of MBA graduate students. He was teaching about charismatic leadership, and the conversation revolved around what they

Corresponding author:
Ken Parry, School of Business, Bond University, Gold Coast, QLD 4229, Australia.
Email: kparry@bond.edu.au
should do to be seen as more charismatic. The students asked, ‘How does this change if I am in a family business?’ ‘What do I do if I am in the public sector?’ and ‘How does this work if they see me all the time?’ He later took it into the executive education context. ‘How does this work if I move up to the SMT?’ and ‘What do I do if I change industry?’ It transpired (perhaps not surprisingly) that the key to charismatic leadership might not be in the ‘leader’ but in the ‘followers’ and in the drama of the busy business lives that they lead. To follow Mumford’s lead (Mumford et al., 2008; Mumford and Van Doorn, 2001) when examining pragmatic leadership, we were putting the follower back into leadership. In the meantime, people might ask, what is the purpose of studying leadership? A recent Google search found almost as many hits for ‘charismatic leadership’ as for ‘transformational leadership’. Clearly, the romantic mythology of charismatic leadership, even in business contexts, is enduring. Antonakis et al. (2011) even researched the teachability of charismatic leadership. We were both intrigued about how people might be able to generate attributions of charismatic leadership, attributions that followers would readily bestow upon them.

In a way similar to the work of Mumford et al., Gabriel (1997) provided an important illumination of follower perspectives of charismatic leadership. Drawing on student internship experiences, he articulated fantasies that the student interns (as followers) painted of the leaders they encountered. These were complex contradictions of the charismatic/messianic leader. Fantasies were outlined of charismatic leaders, and these were suggested to combine in a variety of configurations, such as the ‘father substitute who rewards and punishes arousing fear, loyalty, jealousy and suspicion’ (Gabriel, 1997: 337). In essence, it was a complex picture of the charismatic leader when viewed from the follower’s perspective of the charismatic leadership relationship. It was perhaps a relationship in which ‘follower needs for leaders create objects of fantasy’ (Gabriel, 1997: 338; and similar to Grint’s notion of the sacred in leadership). Making this charismatic leader–follower relationship more overt is the focus of our research. We seek to build on Gabriel’s research with a mixed-method aesthetic narrative approach. We wish to explore the followers ‘objects of fantasy’ from a narrative position, to construct an understanding of charisma from follower’s lived experience. In this way, we seek to demystify charismatic leadership.

Most mainstream leadership is concerned with leaders and followers, those in formal positions of authority and an inherent consensus about authority (Collinson, 2011). This is an essentialist orientation that emphasises the leader-centric attributes of the leader, such as traits, skills, competences and style. Research on charismatic leadership reflects this, most notably the work of Conger and Kanungo (1987, 1988, 1998). An alternative perspective views leadership as relational and discursively constructed; a critical orientation that explores, for example, leader–follower relationships (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006), leadership fantasies (Gabriel, 1997; Meindl, 1995), sacred notions of leadership (Grint, 2010), the ongoing nature of leader and follower identities (Collinson, 2006; DeRue and Ashford, 2010) and processes of becoming rather than being a leader (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Ford, 2010; Kempster, 2006). Collinson (2011) encapsulates this through the notion of critical leadership studies (CLS). This term denotes the broad, diverse and heterogeneous perspectives that share a concern to critique the power relations and identity constructions though which leadership dynamics are often reproduced. Critical studies challenge hegemonic perspectives in the mainstream literature. Taking a post-structural orientation, he draws attention to follower identities. Rather than the essentialist orientation that views follower identities as rational and subscribed with limited attention to aspects of power (namely, coercion), follower identities need to be viewed as ‘inherently ambiguous, typically blurred and usually overlapping’ (Collinson, 2006: 183). The relationship in which these blurred and ambiguous follower identities are constructed and continue to evolve are riddled with issues of power and
emotion. Similarly, Ford provided another critical approach to the development of leader identity. She recognised that our sense of self is ‘not only entwined within the context but also within the hegemonic discourses and culturally shaped narrative conventions’ (Ford, 2010: 62). Leadership identity is largely socially constructed within that context.

In terms of the construction of identity, DeRue and Ashford (2010) outline a thesis for identity construction within the leader–follower relationship seen as processes of identity claiming and identity granting that occur malleably within the ongoing relationship. They comment that ‘current theory [essentialist orientation] offers little insight into how individuals influence each other … to construct the leader-follower relationship’ (p. 629).

In this article, we examine follower narratives of charismatic leadership through the critical lens of emotions – including not only love but also happiness and sadness. The empirical research gap we address then is the limited attention thus far given to followers’ lived experience of the charismatic leadership relationship. We will address this gap through exploring follower narratives, metaphors and fantasies of follower experiences of charismatic leadership. In this way, we connect with Meindl’s (1995) notion of the romance of leadership, with Gabriel (1997) in terms of romantic love, with Calas and Smircich (1991) on the seduction of leadership and with the idealisation of leadership providing ‘absolution from guilt and anxiety’ through the sacredness of leadership (Grint, 2010: 100).

Rather than looking directly at narratives of charismatic leadership, we draw on Western’s (2008) encouragement for methods to look awry. Drawing on Zizek (1992), he suggests that a critical approach of looking awry allows us to move beyond the normative discourse surrounding, for example, charisma and leadership, and become liberated from a particular way of seeing, to see anew and ‘reveal what was previously concealed within dominant discourses’ (Western, 2008: 15). To help us look ‘awry’, we adopted a mixed-method approach.

Our findings are set within the constructed follower frame to outline a critical insight into the charismatic narrative. We illuminate notions of the charismatic relationship embedded with anxiety and emotion – most notably love. We discuss how our research findings can be used to stimulate a manager’s reflexivity about charismatic leadership relationships and in particular make prominent such reflexivity through a focus on identity, narrative and dramaturgy. We conclude by suggesting that our research demystifies charismatic leadership through illuminating the construction of charismatic following. In essence, rather than the mystical notion of charisma being the ‘gift from God’, we suggest that the charismatic leadership relationship might be a ‘gift from followers’. This notion has been around for some time. We shortly explain how Shamir and his colleagues have argued this in alternate forms for many years now. Indeed, in some respects, this notion is part of the root assumptions of the so-called ‘new leadership’ theories. Nonetheless, we try to move thinking from ‘gift from God’ to ‘gift from followers’ in this article. Therefore, we look at charismatic leadership from the perspective of the followers. First, however, let us explore the relationship between charisma and the love story. We then take you through the narrative positivism methodology that we used in this research. The findings give an insight into the identities and narratives that might well explain charismatic leadership in organisations. We finish with some suggestions about how managers can put this into practice in organisations.

**Love, emotion and the charismatic leadership narrative**

Love often appears in narratives about leadership and about charismatic leadership in particular – notably in the work of Meindl (1995) and Gabriel (1997). In the popular press and anecdotally, leadership generates love from the leader (Hoyle, 2002; Hoyle and Slater, 2001) and for the
leader and for the organisation (Boulding, 1989). With regard to the extant theoretical literature on leadership, we found that the spirituality of leadership involves altruistic love (Fry, 2003). The literature on servant leadership often involves the role of love in leadership (Russell and Stone, 2002). Positive leadership affect at work is related to positive follower affect. The positive basic emotions are happiness and love (Shaver et al., 1987). Therefore, we concluded that the relationship between love and leadership might be significant to leader–follower relationships. This is important because leadership is often assumed to ultimately generate positive emotions, like love, for example. Love includes such affiliated emotions as ‘affection’, ‘compassion’, ‘attraction’ and ‘desire’ (Shaver et al., 1987).

Moreover, positive and negative follower affect is related to perceptions of charismatic leadership (Johnson, 2008). Indeed, Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) posited that charismatic leadership is linked to ‘love–hate relationships’ with followers. We suggest that such works of both Johnson (2008) and Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) along with many commentators on charismatic leadership have restricted lenses through which charismatic leadership is viewed as a consequence of the essentialist orientation.

Our critical view of the essentialist notion of charismatic leadership focuses on four scepticisms, and being sceptical is axiomatic of the critical approach. First, we are sceptical about conventional essentialist encapsulations of charisma as a set of behaviours that should be adopted. Conger and Kanungo (1987, 1998) are prominent in this representation of charismatic leadership. Moreover, their suggestion that charismatic leadership can be trained (Conger and Kanungo, 1988) identifies even more closely the notion that charismatic leadership is an essentialist phenomenon encapsulated, for example, as a set of behaviours. This suggestion is in sharp contrast to Collinson’s (2006) relational orientation of leadership in which identities of both leader and follower emerge through and within the relationship and are infused with, for example, contradiction and paradox.

Second, we are sceptical about the suggestion that charisma is implicitly a weakness on the part of the follower that subjects the follower to charismatic attribution. Howell and Shamir (2005), Shamir (1992, 1995) and Shamir et al. (1993) are the main proponents of this argument. The behaviour notion and the follower attribution notion suggest that charismatic leadership is constituted by something that the ‘leader’ does or some way that the ‘follower’ reacts. As suggested above in our first sceptical comment, we view charismatic leadership within an ‘emerging-and-becoming’ relationship, wherein identities of leaders and followers reflect an ongoing complex process of identity granting and claiming. To do so suggests that the unidirectional attribution process is evidently simplistic.

Third, we are sceptical about attempts to objectify charismatic leadership as a specific set of interactions that must be achieved. In particular, these interactions are represented mainly as sets of communications (Den Hartog and Verburg, 1997), often referred to in textbooks as the communication approach to charismatic leadership. This notion is possibly flawed because it looks at the behaviours of leader and follower simultaneously, yet it is likely to be unaware of some deeper underlying dynamics that form the charismatic leadership relationship.

Fourth, we are sceptical about an explicit determination that charisma has a dark side and a good side, and an implicit determination that people who have charismatic attributions are either ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or perhaps more problematically that they are both good and bad. Indeed, as Collinson (2006, 2011) suggests, power and control can be exercised and experienced in a range of subtle ways within everyday leadership practices. Collinson (2005) also highlighted the value of rethinking leadership as a set of dialectical relationships between leaders and followers, in which the relations and practices of leaders and followers are mutually constituted and co-produced.
Our suggested ‘awry’ perspective of the charismatic leader–follower relationship perhaps can be more fully understood through a narrative orientation (Rhodes and Pullen, 2009) and the opportunity that aesthetics of leadership (Hansen et al., 2007) might suggest. Indeed, the dramaturgy of charismatic leadership, theorised beautifully by Gardner and Avolio (1998), suggests that the role (essentialist) or identity (relational) of the charismatic leader within that narrative is just as important a part of the narrative of charismatic leadership as the script or actions of the charismatic leader.

It seems reasonable to suggest that there is a relationship between charisma and love. Indeed, from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, love and charisma are similar processes (Lindholm, 1988). Shamir (2010) has suggested that there are similarities between love and charisma in terms of identification, projection and transference processes. As well as suggesting that there is also some ‘blindness’ associated with it. There are different types of love, and charisma might be closer to the love of a father than to the love of a spouse or a child (Shamir, 2010). Seen in this light, charisma can be construed as patriarchy in terms of sustaining power, domination, control, rank and status as well as a means of demonstrating love, protection, support and fidelity. Therefore, it is important to explore the relationship of love and charisma within the leader–follower relationship viewed from the follower perspective.

We are curious as to whether there might be a deeper underlying construct that might explain charismatic leadership behaviour, follower attributions, emotional contagions and related constructs that pertain to charismatic leadership. There might be a metaphor or generic narrative that helps us to generate greater understanding of this phenomenon. Indeed, looking at this through the narrative lens might help us to uncover the extent to which charismatic leadership is a love story or some other form of narrative. Perhaps, testing the notion of the narrative about the relationship between charismatic leader and follower will help to resolve some of the inherent ambiguity and confusion about this phenomenon and perhaps demystify it.

Shamir (2010) also suggested that one should be cautious about taking the love metaphor too far. Hence, the scope of our research has been delimited. For the purpose of this research, charisma is delimited to the notion of charismatic leadership within organisational settings. Indeed, because charismatic leadership rests upon the attributions of followers, it is the process of the attribution of charisma that is being examined. Therefore, it is not the behaviour of the ‘leader’ that is under investigation. Rather, we are seeking the narrative drawn from lived experience by which followers might explain the impact that charismatic leadership has upon them. We are seeking an explanatory narrative to represent the relationship between followers and the charismatic leader.

The construct of love has also been delimited for the purpose of this research. Complex psychoanalytic notions of charisma have been excluded. Theological notions of God’s benevolent attitude towards mankind have been excluded. Also excluded are the notions of being ‘in love’ and of physical love. Hence, we excluded intimate love or close filial love from the charismatic leadership narrative. We are delimiting in order to confine our analysis to the organisational context to see whether there is a form of love present in the attribution of charisma in organisations and what form this takes. We are attempting to help demystify charisma, and in particular charismatic leadership, by focusing on narratives and identities attributed to the relationship between follower and charismatic leader from the perspective of followers. Of course, love is one of the ‘Big-5’ emotions. Pilot studies and early iterations of this research identified that all emotions are important in understanding the relationship between charisma and leadership. Hence, at the early stages of this project, it was seen as necessary to broaden out the research to encompass the range of emotions and not just love.
As a consequence, the following research questions emerged:

*RQ1.* To what extent are participants articulating a particular narrative metaphor for the relationship between follower and charismatic leader?

*RQ2.* What role do emotions play in this narrative?

**Methodological approach**

Debates regarding approaches and discourses within critical management studies (CMS) have suggested a tendency to be informed through critical–post-structural, constructivist–interpretivist and feminist–post-structural ideas and informed methods (Brewis and Wray-Bliss, 2008). Brewis and Wray-Bliss have stimulated debate to encourage a broader constituency to critical management through extending the nature of the discourse and enable practical engagement between practicing managers and ideas of CMS that have thus far been severely limited. It is in this spirit that our approach is situated. Although we draw on ideas from CMS research, our approach is different, novel in fact for CMS. We are seeking to use a mixed-method approach that is informed through a critical realist frame, drawing on that of Kempster and Parry (2011). Bryman suggests that leadership research can benefit greatly from mixed methods. Rather than an ‘either/or’ question of quantitative or qualitative approaches, mixed methods can enable an enriched understanding of a phenomenon through such an integration (Bryman, 2007: 20). The key for good mixed methods is the sense of enriched understanding of a phenomenon (Bryman, 2007). Our mixed-method approach is intended to achieve an enriched understanding of follower-centric charismatic leadership through taking up Hopwood’s (2009) challenge for more empirics in the world of CMS.

To do this, we have used a technique (rather than philosophical approach) called narrative positivism (Rhodes and Pullen, 2009) or more specifically what we would call aesthetic narrative positivism. We are not attempting to quantify the use of narrative. Nor are we investigating the narratives within organisations. We do not use ‘found’ narratives as data. Rather, we asked participants to help construct a narrative that we then inquired into. We did not use narrative as an empirical lens through which to examine charismatic leadership. Instead, we are attempting to objectify the discourse that people use about charismatic leadership and generate a narrative about charismatic leadership as an outcome of the research. In a sense, the main use for narrative is as a constructive device, such that narrative is the outcome. So often, narrative is used as merely an interpretive device and not as a constructive device. The intent here is for the emerging narrative(s) to enhance the understanding of the lived experience of people in organisations about how they construct charismatic leadership.

Littler and Innes (2003) showed that a quantitative methodology is not inherently biased against a critical stance. Indeed, with the narrative turn in social science (Czarniawska, 1998, 1999), the boundaries between (narrative) fiction and science have become blurred, such that narratives are stories that explain cause and effect in a similar way to positivist-derived theories (see Richardson, 2000; Sutton and Staw, 1995). In narrative positivism, narrative usually is used as data. In this work, we seek mainly to construct a narrative of follower-centric charismatic leadership as the outcome of the research. We also follow the spirit of Hansen’s (2006) notion of the ethnonarrative approach, wherein the discourse that people used is finely tuned to the context from which it emerges. This outcome is in support of Hassard and Buchanan’s (2009) notion that narrative can be an explanation or theory as much as data or component of method. Accordingly, we claim to be more ‘narrative’ than ‘positivist’. Our intention is for positivism to assist the narrative rather than for narrative being of assistance to positivism.
As a device to link the quantitative measures and narratives, we used Shamir and Kark’s (2004) graphic rating scale. This scale enabled us to quantify the level of identification with a number of constructs drawn from followers reflecting upon their experience of charismatic leadership. This insight was used to examine the narrative perception followers had of the relationship between charismatic leader and follower, hereinafter called as the ‘charismatic relationship’. We shall now describe the data that form the dimensions of the charismatic relationship.

Data and analysis

The associated constructs are presented in Table 1. These were included on an instrument that was administered to several groups of executives and MBA students who participated in executive development programmes.

Descriptive statistics assessed the level of conceptual similarity within the mind of participants between charismatic leadership and the alternate notions that were tested for. Some focus groups were conducted between iterations of data collection. In these focus groups, it became more and more clear that the charismatic leadership that people had experienced had an identity component and a narrative component. The identity of the charismatic leader was most immediately apparent in focus group discussions. Also, the anecdotes and stories of the various experiences had a narrative tone to them. Some were very dramatic. Some were homely. Some were quite funny. We gained strong support for looking at an emerging narrative that might explain charismatic leadership. In the later stages of analysis, a cluster analysis (Romosburg, 2004) helped identify the various narratives.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics – for degree of conceptual similarity with implicit notions of charismatic leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean (scale 1–7)</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of affection and warmth</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>−0.47</td>
<td>−0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate desire</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>−0.32</td>
<td>−1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoration and adulation</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>−0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a weakness for</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>−0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical attraction</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>−1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy (movie) genre</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>−0.15</td>
<td>−0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama (movie) genre</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>−0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (movie) genre</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>−0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romance (movie) genre</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction (movie) genre</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>−0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror (movie) genre</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of guilt and sadness</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of anxiety and fear</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>−0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of optimism and happiness</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>−0.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of anger and frustration</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>−0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Negative kurtosis statistic reflects a flat distribution. Normal distribution is reflected by statistic within ± twice the standard error.
and identities that emerged. The research was undertaken in a number of iterations. At each iteration, and in the spirit of the grounded theory notion of theoretical sampling (Parry, 1998), items were removed and new items were added. Within each cohort of data gathering, a focus group was conducted. With each iteration, the emerging narrative became clearer and more explanatory, albeit often quite multidimensionally. Some narratives were strong in love and happiness. However, some possessed both happiness and anger or frustration. We were encouraged to ask for the representation of movie genres within the lived experiences of respondents.

In the first iteration of data gathering, nine definitions of love were tested with 130 participants, all of whom were managers who were undergoing executive education on leadership. The nine definitions of love came from popular online dictionaries. Because the wording of questions was altered substantially for iteration 2, the results of iteration 1 are not reported. In effect, iteration 1 was a pilot for the subsequent iterations of data gathering and analysis.

Following the pilot, a total of 144 individuals participated in the second and subsequent iterations. They were asked to think of a person from their organisational experience who was charismatic. They were asked to reflect upon that relationship between them and their charismatic colleague. Participants were asked to indicate their level of identification between each of the definitions of love that came from online dictionaries and that were used in the pilot research. Especially in the focus groups that accompanied this data gathering, it became clear that the emotional dimension of love was very important. Indeed, the role of emotion was found to be very important when discussing someone who was ‘charismatic’. These findings gave us support with concentrating on the emotional impact of charismatic leadership in subsequent iterations of data gathering. Additionally, we added notions of charisma as a love story, and the level of identification with movie narrative genres, when reflecting upon the relationship with the charismatic person. They were asked to situate their responses within their experiences of the charismatic relationship. These results were measured using Shamir and Kark’s (2004) single-item graphic scale. This scale was used to measure the level of identification in terms of distance or overlap between two entities within a cognitive space. Building on Shamir’s (2010) advice, the graphic rating scale is not seeking to measure correlation between entities. Rather, it seeks to measure perception of separateness or unity between entities (Figure 1).

Shamir and Kark (2004) published their graphic rating scale in an organisational psychology journal. They did us the service of generating a visual representation of similarity between constructs while simultaneously quantifying them. The graphic rating scale gave respondents a visual representation of the level of similarity, or overlap, between this charismatic relationship and each of the emotions and between this charismatic relationship and various movie genres.

**Findings**

**Dimensions of the charismatic relationship**

The results of the graphic rating scale illustrated that the charismatic relationship has the closest similarity with ‘emotions of affection and warmth’ and with ‘comedy’ and ‘family’ movie genres. Emotion of affection and warmth provided conceptual similarity approximating a correlation in excess of 0.60. Responses were skewed to the higher end of the scale, and kurtosis reflected a normal distribution. Comedy and family were the movie genres conceptually closest to the relationship with the charismatic person. The horror movie genre was least closely linked with the charismatic relationship and was eliminated after the second iteration of research, as was the ‘physical attraction’ definition of love, which in this way helped to confirm the discriminant validity of this
methodology. In retrospect, however, with the negative emotions that many respondents attributed to their charismatic leadership experience, it is feasible to conclude that a not unsubstantial minority of people were living out a ‘horror movie’ in their relationship with their charismatic leader.

We undertook focus groups in order to allow the ‘followers’ to elaborate upon the nature of the identification they experienced between love and following a charismatic leader. One participant thought of her or his following as ‘loyalty beyond reason’, and many participants agreed with this. There was almost universal agreement that such following was not identifiable with extreme personalised examples like Charles Manson. Nor was it identified with being in love with another person.

Several participants suggested that the relationship under question was not like that between spouses, whom one ‘knows too well’. When discussion honed in on affection, fondness, regard and warmth, some people mentioned ‘old teacher’, ‘an old friend’ and ‘a mentor’. The emotions that were discussed were not extreme emotions. For example, the relationship might reflect ‘affection’ rather than ‘adoration’ or ‘arousal’, ‘hope’ and ‘pride’ rather than ‘delight’ and ‘elation’, ‘sadness’ rather than ‘anger’, ‘disappointment’ rather than ‘anguish’ and ‘apprehension’ rather than ‘distress’.

Importantly, the participant’s reflections on the dimensions of the charismatic relationship being measured in the second iteration were talking about their following of the charismatic leader within this relationship. It was the following that they were identifying with. Consequently, within the focus groups associated with the second and subsequent iterations, people were asked more specifically to consider ‘charismatic following’ and the ‘charismatic relationship’ rather than just the charismatic person.

Figure 1. Graphic rating scale. Numbers 1 through 7 were used for statistical analysis, to measure the level of identification in terms of distance or overlap between two entities within a cognitive space. Shaded = charismatic leadership; unshaded = alternate notion. Alternate notions are listed in Table 1, for example, ‘Emotion of affection and warmth’, ‘Passionate desire’ and so on.
Charismatic relationship as ‘love and hate’

Descriptive data are presented in Table 1. In the third iteration, conceptual similarity with two more emotions was examined. Those additional emotions were ‘guilt and sadness’ and ‘anxiety and fear’. Emotions of fear and sadness were dissimilar, helpfully providing further discriminant validity for the methodology. Emotions of love still had the closest conceptual similarity with the relationship under investigation. Comedy and family were still the movie genres conceptually closest to the relationship. The family movie genre correlated strongly and significantly with emotions of affection and warmth, representing love. However, 4 out of 27 participants in iteration 3 reported high similarity with ‘fear’ and high similarity with love. This apparently paradoxical finding suggests validity for the ‘love–hate’ identity for the relationship with a charismatic leader. It was becoming clear that charismatic leadership in organisations was a multidimensional construct, and one that we could probably not generalise about.

Respondents were also asked to nominate a metaphor for their relationship with the charismatic person. For those who saw this relationship as closest to ‘emotions of affection and warmth’ and either or both of the comedy and family movie genres, nominated metaphors included ‘dynamic’, ‘oasis in the desert’, ‘captain’, ‘floatation device in a sea of doubts’, ‘roots of a giant family tree’, ‘big fellow with a calming voice’, ‘caring father and son’ and ‘safe happy home to go to’.

A fourth and final iteration was undertaken to test further the paradoxical emotional impact within the charismatic relationship. The full range of higher order emotions (Shaver et al., 1987) had now been tested – love, happiness, sadness, anger and fear. Affection and happiness appear to be the emotions most usually associated with the relationship. Drama, comedy and family are the movie genres that most strongly reflect the charismatic relationship in the work context. By iteration 4, we were sensing that respondents were clustering into three or four groups of similar narrative experience. A cluster analysis was necessary.

Charismatic following: multiple concurrent narratives

It was by now very clear from the focus groups and from the distribution of results that multiple narratives would explain the relationship between follower and charismatic leader. In particular, it appeared that there is a predominant narrative about positive affect, a second narrative about both positive and negative affect within the relationship at work and a third narrative about negative affect. A hierarchical tree plot indicated that three clusters were plausible, reflecting positive affect, mixed affect and negative affect. A K-Means Cluster Analysis (Romesburg, 2004) was undertaken. Emotions were the variables entered, and cases were labelled by metaphor to attempt to determine which metaphors aligned with particular clusters of responses.

The squared Euclidean distance measure (Finch, 2005) was applied to measure the distance from the centre of the cluster to each member of the cluster. By seeking four clusters, a clearer and more robust clustering of responses was achieved. Predictably, one cluster reflected a narrative that was represented by high affection and low fear. This is the ‘positive-affect cluster’. The second cluster reflected a narrative that was represented by moderate levels of all emotions. This is the ‘positive-negative-affect cluster’. A third cluster reflected high anger and low levels of the other emotions. This is the ‘anger cluster’. The necessary fourth cluster was populated by outliers that did not cluster clearly to any particular narrative.

For the positive-affect cluster, metaphors that were closest to the centre of the cluster included ‘leadership by example’, ‘butter – makes things better’, ‘many times knocked down and gets back
up’, ‘wistfulness’ and ‘favourite uncle not to disappoint’. Both positive emotions were clearly evident. The clearest movie genre was ‘family’. For the positive–negative affect cluster, metaphors that were closest to the centre of the cluster included ‘warmth of the sun’, ‘born to be wild + scary movie’, ‘chalk and cheese’ and ‘a superhero but you know his identity’. This cluster certainly reflects a more paradoxical nature for the relationship between follower and charismatic leader. Indeed, weakness and guilt correlated with a family drama narrative. The image that emerged was that of a slightly volatile and perhaps dysfunctional family. The anger cluster metaphors included ‘black sheep’, ‘fighting a war’ and ‘surviving in a life raft’. The negativity and dysfunctionality of this cluster was palpable. The final emotion cluster centres are represented in Table 2. Metaphors that reflect each of the three clusters are represented in Table 3.

Table 2. Final emotion cluster centres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>1 – ’anger’</th>
<th>2 – positive AND negative affect</th>
<th>3 – positive affect</th>
<th>4 – outliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of affection and warmth</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of anxiety and fear</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of anger and frustration</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of optimism and happiness</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale 1–7, n = 91.
Note: bold signifies major conceptual overlap with ‘Charisma’.

Table 3. Metaphors reflecting the three emotion clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster 1 – ‘Anger’</th>
<th>Cluster 2 – Positive AND negative affect</th>
<th>Cluster 3 – Positive affect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black sheep</td>
<td>Like an eagle – shows no fear</td>
<td>On a pedestal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surviving in a life raft</td>
<td>Father-like figure</td>
<td>Father–daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice</td>
<td>Chameleon</td>
<td>Respected uncle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodgeball – ‘blame game’</td>
<td>Sledgehammer against concrete</td>
<td>A ship at anchor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting a war</td>
<td>Unpredictable and volatile</td>
<td>Bear and cubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uphill battle</td>
<td>Fireworks – bursting full of ideas</td>
<td>Well-oiled machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Man (movie)</td>
<td>High-energy inspirational leadership</td>
<td>Passionate dictator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like an army tank</td>
<td>Ride and die together; brothers for life</td>
<td>Like being kids again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to go the extra mile</td>
<td>Crest of a wave</td>
<td>Friendly looking statue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘You can’t handle the truth!’</td>
<td>Family pit bull</td>
<td>Best friend – always there</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To explore these cluster findings in more detail, two focus groups were further undertaken in order to flesh out the nature of the lived experience of these charismatic relationships. The relationships were certainly characterised by both positive and negative affect. More importantly, it was often characterised by positive and negative affect concurrently. One was ‘not happy all the time’; there was much ‘flip-flop’ and charismatic leaders would ‘change roles’. Some experiences in the
anger cluster were seen as threats (‘I have been burnt’), and other experiences in the positive-affect cluster had a strong family theme – one experience was likened to that of a grandmother. Another participant likened the relationship to that of ‘kindling’, wherein the relationship would ‘flare up and flame from time to time’, but for the main part, the relationship was stable and non-emotive. It should be noted that positive emotions were mentioned much more than negative emotions.

Discussion

The essentialist orientation of leadership understandably views charismatic leadership as associated with the leader. Our research, which has assumed a relational orientation of leadership, has identified a different conception of charismatic leadership. Through an examination of followers’ lived experience of the charismatic leader–follower relationship in organisations, we have shown that it is a complex and paradoxical phenomenon. First, seen through a metaphoric lens, the charismatic relationship can be seen as a range and combination of movies: a comedy, drama, romance, fiction and horror. Second, the description dimensions of the charismatic relationship were shown to be contrasting – for example, affection and warmth, guilt and sadness, optimism and happiness and anger and frustration. Third, such contrasts existed concurrently.

From both the essentialist and relational perspectives, it is clear that charismatic leadership is connected with identity. Indeed, our findings drawn from a follower-centric focus suggest that identification linked with love is important to the charismatic leadership relationship. Aspects of charismatic relational following have been identified as complex, paradoxical and riddled with emotion in which this narrative identity of relational following is situated. Such relational following of charismatic leadership is firmly anchored within a broader structure of societal influences. Meindl (1995) captured the essence of this as the romance of leadership. The resonance of the movie metaphors on the lived experience of the charismatic relationship speak to this and to the structures that permeate these leader–follower relationships. Structures related to patriarchal influence have emerged strongly within our narrative of the charismatic relationship: an enjoyable and supportive family storyline, yet with discipline and ‘tough-love’.

A post-structural critical interpretation would place emphasis on the structure over agency. Examples are Calas and Smircich’s (1991) orientation to the charismatic relationship as seduction or Grint’s (2010) notion of the sacred in leadership. We draw on a critical realist perspective of structure and agency in saying that both have a malleable effect upon the other: structure pre-exists agents and must be a condition of agency; yet, structures depend on agents, and agency has the potential to elaborate structures through morphogenesis (Archer, 2000). We place particular emphasis on Archer’s notion of ‘Actor’. The actor is seen as someone who

occupies a social role which is neither the passive puppet of social forces [shaping the follower or leader role] nor a pre-social self whose adroitness at playing [the follower or leader role] begs the question how the individual became so endowed. (Archer, 2000: 283)

The actor becomes interested in the role she or he performs. However, social structures are seen to ‘condition the type of social actor [follower or leader] the vast majority can and do become’ (Archer, 2000: 284). We see much value in this notion of actor for the following two reasons. First, we see value in a critical awareness of influences (both agency and structure) shaping the charismatic relationship and processes of identification – a sense of reflexive awareness of the charismatic
relationship. Second, we see value with regard to the notion of actor as an identity, as well as a narrative and as part of the dramaturgy of the charismatic leadership performance.

**Reflexive attention to charismatic leadership: demystifying the relationship**

We have shown that the charismatic leadership relationship is complex and paradoxical. The nature of the relationship is structured through societal romanticised expectations. We have shown that charisma is about following, and such following appears to take the form of love. Without a reflexive insight into this, we suggest that the charismatic relationship is perhaps more a form of ‘blind love’. Our research suggests that aspects of this blindness relate to anxiety, anger, passion, commitment, loyalty, affection and happiness. The consequence is to engender a sense of dependence and powerlessness to the societally embedded role of the follower within the charismatic leadership relationship. Theoretical debates in leadership studies have argued for the need to move away from heroic leadership that engenders such dependence more towards notions of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002). Empirical research has shown that follower expectations of leadership limit the scope for such a movement (Collinson and Collinson, 2009; Grint, 2010). A reflexive exploration of follower-centric charismatic leadership might help explore the sacred notions of leadership and address the blindness of the charismatic relationship. Part of enabling more insight into the charismatic relationship is associated with demystifying the notion of charismatic leadership. This demystifying can occur for managers (and followers) through a reflexive appreciation of the construction of the charismatic affect within leader–follower relationships. Part of enabling more insight into the charismatic relationship is associated with demystifying the notion of charismatic leadership. We suggest three interconnected aspects that can structure a manager’s reflexivity: identity, narrative and dramaturgy.

**Identity, narrative and dramaturgy**

We propose that to stimulate reflexive exploration of charismatic leadership attribution at work, managers might need to think through the form of identity and processes of identification present in their leader–follower relationship. We suggest that this would catalyse an exploration of aspects of power and emotion including aspects of anxiety and attraction imbued within the romanticised role they occupy. Our research suggests an archetype identity that might just have resonance in developing a charismatic relationship – that of a respected member of family, caring for and supporting fellow workers while creating an enjoyable context for work. We suggest that the emotions to be generated from this identity relate to optimism, happiness, affection and warmth without shying away from the frustration that inevitably emerges from these contexts. We are also suggesting that reflexive awareness by managers of concurrent multiple identities is very relevant.

It is apparent that charismatic leadership is probably not a ‘love story’, in the generally accepted representation of that term. Rather, it reflects Gabriel’s (1997) notions of love associated with identification: someone for whom one would have affection, fondness, regard, a sense of warmth and yet a respect born from not wanting to disappoint. The metaphorical respected person from the broad familial environment – such as a respected aunt/uncle or ‘elder’ or even ‘teacher’ – might capture the essence of this identity. By intentionally seeking to enable this identity to become constructed while enacting one’s managerial role, we suggest it might draw on patriarchal structures – or at least parental structures (which align with follower expectations) – but in a manner that is conducive to modifying the relationship. By thinking through the charismatic identity, we suggest that the taken-for-granted assumptions of the leader–follower relationship can be deconstructed and then reconstructed in the manner we describe. The importance of the organisational narrative to the manifestation of leadership has been argued by Parry and Hansen (2007).
Aligned to the reflexive examination of charismatic identity is the need to be reflexive of both the structures shaping the broader charismatic leadership narrative and the nature of the relational narrative in which a manager is situated.

The attribution of charisma is significantly shaped by the narrative associated with charismatic leadership. We have suggested that the charismatic leadership relationship is more about following than about the behaviour of the person in the leadership role. Hence, the charisma ‘story’ will vary according to the attributions, expectations and implicit theories of the followers who shape the following. Reflexivity on this issue would, we suggest, open up many taken-for-granted assumptions – after all, managers are themselves followers and have been shaped by societal expectations that guide their narrative of charismatic leadership. Asking a manager to consider the narrative as a love story could stimulate much reflexivity in terms of her or his narrative of current leader–follower relationship and the narrative associated with past relationships.

The following that we have shown as being central to the charismatic leadership relationship could be captured in a follower narrative that simply describes good quality leader–follower relationships. Conversely, a narrative of a poor leader–follower relationship may generate the absence of charismatic following. Of importance here is the narrative of the relationship.

Burke’s (1975) dramatistic pentad provides an insight into the roles of identity and narrative in the attribution of the charismatic leadership relationship in organisational settings. Alongside reflexive exploration of identity/identification and narrative, we believe that a dramaturgical approach might be complementary. For example, our suggested role in the charismatic leadership relational drama for the manager might be that of a wise, respected relative or some other respected person. Indeed, the Maori role of Kaumatua, meaning senior member of the tribe, or elder, provides a relevant analogy, and such examples may help give sense to identity and narrative through the enactment of the drama of being an ‘elder’. Exploration of the current leader–follower situated plot would expose many taken-for-granted assumptions about everyday dramaturgical enactments. An example is the relational drama part-comedy, part-tragedy and part-epic. A reflexive interpretation of the emotional impact of the current drama might be affection, frequent humour, a little anxiety and intermittent frustration. Further consideration of the script, costume and setting is relevant to the situation within which the current charismatic leadership relational drama is being enacted. Of course, a happy ending to this drama is anticipated by the followers to help make sense of their roles and expectations – but can an ending occur? If the relationship is not a discrete one-off project, such as the metaphor of the movie, then consideration should be given to the leader–follower relationship as a ‘serial’. Managers could be encouraged to suggest the serial that resonates most to the current situation (e.g. the UK TV series such as East Enders, Coronation Street or Neighbours) and perhaps explore alternative examples (such as Holby City, The Archers or House). Finally, stimulating a reflexive approach to analysing the situated drama would include an examination of both backstage and front stage – revealing details of parallel dramatic performances and the nature of the relationships both front stage and backstage (Goffman, 1959). Thinking about the leader–follower relationship as being enacted on a ‘stage’ might stimulate much reflexive thought about what constitutes the stages and how these are structured and maintained.

For a critical perspective on charismatic leadership, we have introduced some statistics and an element of positivism. We recognise the limitations that come from researching a very emotive construct with the essentially unemotive and objectivist methodology of a questionnaire. The emotive and processual nature of the charismatic leadership phenomenon can never be fully brought to life with a questionnaire. However, rather than seeing this as a limitation, we like to think that the statistics have helped to complement and strengthen the critical and
narrative analysis that we have engaged. The statistics might add some enhanced plausibility to the arguments that are posited. A more genuine limitation is the reduced role that focus groups played as a result of the concentration on quasi-survey research that we utilised. We have found over the years that any form of survey research tends to disengage the researcher from the research participants.

Therefore, future research needs to make greater efforts to engage focus groups and one-on-one interviews at the stage of data gathering. Accordingly, future research needs to flesh out the nature of the metaphors and narratives that people identify with their charismatic leadership experience. These need to be in-depth interviews. For example, if someone nominates the metaphor of ‘dodge-ball’ and identifies with both the comedy and drama movie genres, and nominates a paradoxical contrast of strongly felt emotions, it would be interesting and enlightening to talk for an hour about the experiences that they have had. Perhaps unforeseen aspects of charismatic leadership might be uncovered. Perhaps a plausible underlying identity and narrative might emerge that people could possibly bring to life within their own personal context and possibly generate desirable and powerful charismatic attributions. Nonetheless, we still think that numerical data gathering is useful for research of this genre. Indeed, we believe that there is much scope for ongoing positivist-supported narrative research. However, the links between the responses and the lived experiences that provide the responses need to be teased out and investigated in even greater detail. After all, the strength of any metaphor is in the explanation of the visual imagery.

Conclusion

This is an appropriate time to revisit our research questions, which asked about the role of emotions within a particular narrative metaphor that participants might be articulating about the charismatic relationship. We believe that our contribution with this research is to bring attention to charismatic leadership from a follower perspective. In particular, we focused on the relational orientation of charismatic leadership. Indeed, we identified that our contribution might be to focus not on leader qualities but rather on the process of follower following captured within notions of identification with a love story. We have identified aspects of a ‘love–hate’ relationship. Perhaps the notion of the ‘love–hate’ relationship conjures images of lovers squabbling. However, we have concentrated on the organisational or workplace setting for charismatic leadership. Therefore, the reflexivity that participants gave us indicates that the nature of the dramatic narrative could and should not be as intense or passionate or obsessive as a relationship fuelled by desire. Perhaps the notion could be more like ‘love–frustration’ or ‘love–agitation’ or even ‘love–resentment’.

Perhaps the ‘love–frustration’ following illuminates a complex and paradoxical relationship captured within a narrative identity. We have suggested an archetype narrative identity that might positively engage with shaping the charismatic leadership relationship within organisations. We concluded with a discussion towards how to enable a manager to learn reflexively about the charismatic leadership relationship from the perspective of followers. We certainly do not suggest that there are ‘seven principles’ to developing charismatic leadership. On the contrary, if managers in organisations adopt the identity that we have argued, and enact that identity within the context of the narrative that we have argued, then what they say and do will flow from that. Indeed, perhaps their ‘followers’ will reciprocate by bestowing attributions of charismatic leadership upon those managers.

We have already mentioned Burke’s (1975) dramatistic pentad as a way to make sense of charismatic leadership. We also now suggest it as a way to implement the findings from this research. We propose that to develop a charismatic leadership attribution at work, managers in leadership
roles might need to take on the role or identity of the archetypes and metaphors that emerged from this research. By intentionally adopting this identity while enacting one’s managerial job, one might create a self-fulfilling prophecy and better enhance the outcomes that are desired. Such an understanding might help managers to shape behaviour and management style to enhance a form of charismatic attribution that is healthy and developmental. They might be encouraged to interact with followers in the way that this archetype might act. In so doing, these managers can be more confident that they are having a charismatic impact upon their followers and might be attributed with charismatic qualities by followers. This impact will generate positive emotions in followers, and those people will identify more effectively with the manager and what she or he stands for.

Also, managers could try to enact the relative narrative or drama that they see as being relevant to their context and audience. Their ‘role’ might be that of a wise, respected relative: perhaps part-parent and part-teacher. Family roles seem to figure prominently in the archetypes and metaphors that emerged from this research. The ‘plot’ for this drama might be part-comedy, part-family movie and part-drama. From time to time, there will be some ‘action’ in this narrative. The ‘audience’ know their job. They need support to get on with it. Perhaps occasionally they might need a ‘rev-up’. The emotional impact on the audience will be that of considerable affection, frequent humour, perhaps a little anxiety and intermittent frustration. Everyone will want a ‘happy ending’ to their narrative drama. Of course, the script, costume and setting will all be relevant to the context. In terms of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical analysis, there might be lots of backstage and occasional unconventional, counter-normative, risky, confident and memorable front stage.

We have addressed the ‘blind love’ of the charismatic relationship, and through this critical approach, we have developed what we might instead call a ‘respectful’ love. In The Merchant of Venice, Act 2, Scene 6, Shakespeare’s (2012) Jessica says ‘Love is blind, and lovers cannot see the pretty follies that themselves commit’. Once again, we have not found evidence of ‘lovers’ in organisations. We have not found evidence of emotions of arousal or longing. Rather, we have found affection and compassion as the emotions that reflect the charismatic leadership relationship. These emotions come from the charismatic leader, and they tend to be reciprocated from followers, along with warmth and respect. We have shown within the context of the leader–follower relationship that rather than the mystifying notion of charisma being ‘a gift from God’, it perhaps could be seen from a relational and constructed perspective as ‘a gift from followers’.

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