The Frontstage of Leadership?

Vice Chancellor Profiles and the Performance of Self

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Abstract: What makes a Vice Chancellor a Vice Chancellor? This article assesses – through unobtrusive research methods– the 37 public profiles of Australia Vice Chancellors in the nation's public universities. I deploy non-reactive methods to locate the characteristics deemed of value in each profile, such as qualifications, research field, teaching expertise, personal life, leisure pursuits, and educational and non-educational experiences. I track similarities and differences between the profiles and ponder the development of a 'genre' of shared characteristics. In this first international study, the goal is to assess whether recent controversies about university leadership are the result of a 'few bad apples' or a systematic valuing of particular attributes and the neglect of other, crucial necessities of university leadership, particularly after a pandemic.

Keywords: University Leadership, Frontstage, Vice Chancellors, Double Refusal, Jean Baudrillard, Erving Goffman

1. Introduction

Downloading pornography on a university computer (Higgott, 2016). Sexual harassment, buried, masked and ignored by multiple universities for over a decade (Bastian, 2020). Hiring friends outside of regulated institutional processes (Higgott, 2016). Irregular relationships with the Chinese government (Frijters, 2020; Smee, 2020). Payback for whistle blowers (Styles, 2020). These are the tabloidized headlines revealing the behaviour of the Vice Chancellors in Australian universities. These are the stories that are known and documented through investigations by the Western Australian Corruption and Crime Commission (CCC, 2016), and the Independent Commission against Corruption in South Australia (ICAC, 2020). Other behaviours may be buried through resignations, cliched statements such as 'spending more time with the family,' or a hasty retirement.

This article is not an expose into allegations. Instead, I isolate a small component of university media. This research probes the institutional public profiles of the Vice Chancellors leading Australian Universities,

deploying Goffman's *The Presentation of Self* and Baudrillard's 'double refusal,' to understand - in a time of public controversy, shame and monitoring of university leadership - what has been constructed and promoted as the qualities and characteristics of value and importance.

These institutional profiles are media sites created by universities for consumption by 'stakeholders.' I investigate what these universities configure as the requirements of a post-pandemic Vice Chancellor. Put another way, are there simply 'a few bad apples' (Brabazon, 2020) in the ranks of Australian Vice Chancellors? Are these leaders suffering from 'academentia' (Kilkauer and Young, 2021)? Conversely, are there characteristics that are recognized, valued and shared by these leaders in public universities that create the spaces and potential for institutional, social, sexual and hiring irregularities? Are there normative ideologies of leadership summoned by – and promoted by – Australian Vice Chancellors?

This article assesses – through unobtrusive research methods– the 37 public profiles of Australia Vice Chancellors in the nation's public universities. I deploy non-reactive methods to locate the characteristics deemed of value in each profile, such as qualifications, research field, teaching expertise, personal variables, leisure pursuits, and educational and non-educational experience. I track similarities and differences between the profiles and ponder the development of a 'genre' of shared characteristics.

I did not know what I would discover when I commenced. My intention was to ensure that what was invisible – what was not highlighted – was also logged. A methodological challenge of this research was how to manage silences and absences in under-utilized information sources (Low and Hyslop-Margison, 2021). What is the scale of data required to summon a pattern or interpretation? Social semiotics allows researchers to place the signifiers located through the research into a context. Because of the size of the data set – 37 public profiles – I do not need to sample. Ethical permissions were not required as reactive methods were not deployed. Surveys and interviews offer a subjective view of Vice Chancellors. Noting the high-profile cases of harassment and corruption, it is important to return to a foundational textual system. What makes a Vice Chancellor a Vice Chancellor?

2. The Research Literature Shaping the Investigation into Vice Chancellor Profiles

There are four clusters of research that scaffold this project: Critical university studies, Higher education leadership, Erving Goffman studies, and Jean Baudrillard's 'double refusal.'
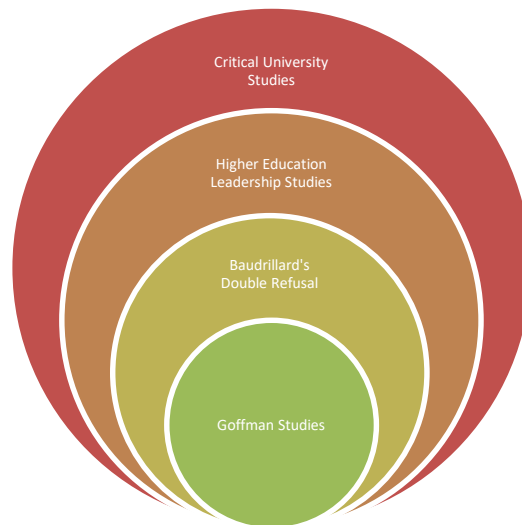
Two of these literatures are very small and specialised: Goffman Studies and Baudrillard's 'double refusal'. When combined, these four literatures focus the variables and characteristics to be interpreted through the investigation of the Vice Chancellor's profiles. These paradigms are post-disciplinary, moving through the humanities and social sciences.

3. Goffman Studies

Erving Goffman was a marginal and marginalized sociologist that investigated the marginal and the marginalized. Although moving out of scholarly fashion in the decade after his death in 1982, recent scholarly monographs have rejuvenated discussions of Goffman's theories. Much of this attention remains focused on his early works: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and *Stigma* (1964). Recent attention, as shown through Jurgen Raab's monograph on Erving Goffman from the perspective of the new sociology of knowledge (2019), explores how interactions emerge to build a social order. Put another way, Goffman enables researchers to probe how social situations organize the self.

This research probing Vice Chancellor's profiles required a return to Goffman's original monographs, alongside how this research has moved into leadership studies. The key focus remains *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). While he probed social life with attention on physical relationships, the movement to the online environment provides opportunities for innovation in the reconfiguration of the 'stage' for rehearsed behaviour. The Vice Chancellor profile is rehearsed and circulates some characteristics, rendering other variables in the 'backstage'. Goffman confirms,

> When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. Although some of this information seems to be sought almost as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others

to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him (1959, p. 1).

The goal of my research is to track 'sign-vehicles' (1959, p. 1). While Goffman commenced his project through a participant observation analysis of Scottish crofters, there is something provocative and powerful when applying the movement 'between cynicism and sincerity' (1959, p. 12) to the online profile of Vice Chancellors. Attention to the 'interaction ritual' was also a focus for Goffman (1967). This monograph confirmed his capacity to work on the small scale, and show how interactions are used to improve social standing. Particular focus was granted to 'face-work' (1967, p. 13). This attention to interaction, communication and regulation opens out to 'engagement with certain categories of others' (Goffman 1963 125). Therefore, opportunities such as public profiles provide sites of engagement.

Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* was based on his doctoral research set in the Shetland Islands. But this empirical project was unable to find a publisher. He reconfigured the research to create a new theory of 'frontstage' and 'backstage.' It was then published. Goffman demonstrates through his use of demeanour that qualities are tested in the backstage and then emerge on the frontstage (1959). The scale of Goffman's disciplinary inspiration in the social sciences is revealed through Thomas Hood and Dwight Van de Vate's *The Goffman Lectures* (2017). They focus attention on how his ideas have moved through time and contexts, investigating the dance between personal and social identity. Similarly, Michael Hvidd Jacobsen and Soren Kristiansen demonstrated how Goffman probed 'the everyday' interaction, while understanding how deviance is socialized (2015, p. 4). The challenge remains how to activate these arguments at a macroscale.

These theories have found new platforms for testing in the online environment. Birnbaum took 'Goffman on a tour of Facebook' (2008), exploring the role of photographs and performances to configure an audience. Through these new sites of exploration, visual research methods gain traction through either Critical Discourse Analysis or social semiotics. Particularly, in assessing the Vice Chancellor's profiles, the links presented on the profile to social media platforms are evaluated. Significantly, there is a small literature, peppered over the decades since Goffman's death that apply his theories to leadership. There is a reason for this absence. Because much of Goffman's career explored outsiders and the marginalized, empowered leaders did not seem appropriate for the deployment of theories about those locked in asylums or confronting stigma. Significantly, there has been a use of his research to understand women in leadership positions, particularly in community colleges (Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999). The argument is that because community colleges are more open and diverse in their structures, spaces are available for women to show and be recognized for their abilities. The 'ideal' abilities that are witnessed in higher education maintain less of a hold in community colleges. Their study deployed interviews with senior women and found complexity, ambiguity and also stress. For Tedrow and Rhoads, Goffman was useful as he, 'observed those who responded to their outsider status by choosing to live a dual existence [which] tended to complicate their life' (1999, p. 11). The women they studied had to respond to 'organizational expectations and norms as defined by typical male instrumental roles and behaviour' (1999, p. 6). Therefore, this early study provided assumptions to monitor when interpreting the data set derived from unobtrusive research methods.

This attention to marginalized groups in leadership was extended by Lisa Livingston-Bridwell, through her research into 'the perceptions and lived experience of lesbian leaders' (2021, p. ii). She demonstrated that the 'work and life balance' requires deeply considered societal negotiations and requires organizational reform. She probed the consequences of lesbians being 'compartmentalized or reduced to merely females wearing uncomfortable shoes in the workplace' (2021, p. 16). Deploying Goffman allowed her to think about how the characteristics of leadership are perpetuated in organizations and how the frontstage offers particular challenges to lesbians occupying positions of power.

Goffman's attention to interaction opens out organization theory and the concept of leadership. Indeed, Linda Smircich and Gareth Morgan described leadership as 'socially constructed through interaction' (1982, p. 258). They demonstrated how roles institutionalize interactions, rather than personal traits. Their study concluded with a stunning maxim: 'leadership as the management of meaning' (1982, p. 261). Their early research is tested through Vice Chancellor's profiles, to ascertain if and then how leadership involves the organization of symbols. These symbols include institutional rankings that transform into proxies for public performances. Leopold Ringel, using *The Presentation of Self* and its attention to pre-established patterns that are performed through an interaction (Goffman 1959, p. 16), demonstrated how rankings activate stakeholder audiences and 'package' a public performance. The 'backstage' is the place where contradictions are managed. This tested identity package is then moved from the backstage through to social media (Ringel, 2021, pp. 53-76).

A study by Autumn Tooms, Catherine Lugg and Ira Bogotch also used Goffman to develop 'the politics of fit and educational leadership' (2010, pp. 96-131). Fascinatingly, they probed the conflation of 'the role and responsibilities of leadership within the framework of one's identity' (2010, p. 96). They explored how the phrase 'best fit' is situated within 'organizational sense making' (2010, p. 98). Activating poststructural theories, demonstrating the contingency of 'reality' and 'truth', their use of Goffman shows how organizational 'fit' is used to ensure that particular frontstages and identity tropes are prioritized, while others are blocked and covered. Tropes such as 'fit' restrict the social diversity of leaders.

One of the key – if under-emphasized – tropes of Goffman's work is the role of the audience in sustaining the performance. So 'the audience' for the performance (of leadership) must believe the frontstage is authentic. Noting the high-profile cases of misdemeanours in Australian higher education, this 'belief' is being threatened. The backstage of Vice Chancellors – from sexism to suspicion, patronage, ego, greed, xenophobia and narcissism – is bleeding through to the frontstage. Therefore, a second body of literature is required. While there may seem to be an easier mesh between Baudrillard's[1] simulacrum and Goffman's frontstage, actually Goffman requires the floating signifiers to 'land' and hook into audience expectations of leadership. Therefore, a different component of Baudrillard's research is required to hone *The Presentation of Self* to leadership: the double refusal.

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[1] I have chosen to focus on Jean Baudrillard. I note that Zizek is increasingly deployed in management theory. However, Zizek's theorization of capitalism and identity is impacted by Eurocommunism. While welcome, this lens inhibits the transferability of the research. Please refer to (Abbott and Mackinnon 2019).

4. Baudrillard's Double Refusal

Jean Baudrillard was ridiculed by Jordan Peterson as a postmodernist (Nicholls, 2019). Yet his posthumously published monographs and essays offer great insight into Leadership Studies, particularly in understanding the presidency of Donald Trump and Brexit (Brabazon, Redhead and Chivaura, 2018). Baudrillard, in his late period, probed the nature of power. In *The Agony of Power*, he developed the concept of the 'double refusal' (2010a). This phrase captures two cultural movements: the sovereign refuses to dominate, and the subject refuses to be dominated. This idea is further developed through *Carnival and Cannibal* (Baudrillard, 2010b).

> it is power itself that has to be abolished – and not just in the refusal to be dominated, which is the essence of all traditional struggles, but equally and as violently in the refusal to dominate. For domination implies both these things, and if there were the same violence or energy in the refusal to dominate, we would long ago have stopped dreaming of revolution. And this tells us why intelligence cannot - and never will be able to – be in power: because it consists precisely in this twofold refusal. (Baudrillard, 2010b, pp.17-18)

Through such an argument, power must be abolished. This is shown by the failed revolutions of May 1968, the 'post political' Italian Autonomists from the 1970s, or the failures of the left through the late 1970s and early 1980s in France and the United Kingdom. The holding of power, and the inability to be involved in how it is exercised, summons what Zizek describes as 'power itself is an embarrassment and there is no one to assume it truly' (2014, p. 8). As confirmed through the successful Brexiteers, the snap resignation of David Cameron and the inability of Donald Trump to acknowledge that he lost the presidential election, there is a refusal to dominate and a refusal to be dominated. This is the irrationality and denial of power. It summons a culture of narcissism, selfishness and incompetence.

This is not an individual matter. David Frum noted the consequences of this double refusal.

> The thing to fear from the Trump presidency is not the bold overthrow of the Constitution, but the stealthy paralysis of governance; not the open defiance of the law, but an accumulating sub version of norms; not the deployment of state power to intimidate dissidents, but the incitement of private violence to radicalize supporters. (Frum, 1918, p. xi)

As seen through the refusal to make decisions about public health and the pandemic, and the refusal of citizens to accept restrictions even in their own best interests, Baudrillard's double refusal is activated. Activating both banality and 'sub versions of norms' configures a culture of instability, confusion, agitation, and a lack of focus. This is non regulation, rather than deregulation. Noting this theoretical inflection on leadership, this presentation of important literature moves into leadership studies within Higher Education, then concluding with the specific frame of higher education studies.

5. Higher Education Leadership Studies

The specific leadership literature being deployed in this research encircles crises, particularly COVID-19.

Joan Gallos and Lee Bolman, in *Reframing Academic Leadership*, confirmed that 'no institution and none of us will ever be quite the same,' recognizing that 'the pandemic tells its own leadership story' (2021, p. vii). The story they present is a warning: 'the same dynamic that produced the coverup in Wuhan – and allowed so many to deny the meaning and implications of Black Lives Matter for so long – are also endemic in academic leadership' (2021, p. viii). Gallos and Bolman focus on the disappointments, the despair and the darkness within university leadership, at the very time that the world required researchers to offer high quality information about public health, public education and citizenship. They discuss the difficulty in developing collaboration and partnerships beyond the siloes of the lab and classroom, and the importance of 'sensemaking' (2021, p. 22). Pandemic pedagogy or 'quaranteaching' (Jelinska and Paradowski, p. 2021) requires attention to rapid transitions and decisions made under intense stress. Before COVID-19 and after the Global Financial Crisis, educational leadership theory was focused on managing the economic crises in universities (Gibbs and Barnett, 2014). Therefore, this key period of university leadership offers powerful, volatile and provocative opportunities for new theory development.

Many models of leadership are found wanting in higher education. For example, Jackie Ford and Nancy Harding revealed the weaknesses of authentic leadership stating that, 'authentic leaders must be prepared to reveal themselves through their practices and behaviours, and the self that is revealed must be the authentic self' (2017, p. 467). Yet the question is no longer whether leaders are 'born' or 'made.' Instead, this cliché is radically reconfigured through David Pendleton, Adrian Furnham and Jon Cowell's *Leadership: no more heroes* (2021). They show the importance of creating, 'the conditions for people and organisations to thrive and achieve significant goals' (2021, p. xii). This significant correction allows organizational culture to be researched, and leadership placed within it. With leadership situational, attention is required on how situations are shaped. Similarly, Troy Heffernan, Scott Eacott and Lynn Bosetti stressed the variable of 'context' to understanding higher education leadership (2021, p. 1063). They argue that leaders both constitute and emerge from their context. COVID-19 was part of this 'context,' which prompted Annabel Beerel to ask, 'What happened to the leaders? Few were to be found' (2021, loc 350). She argued that these questions are difficult to answer because scholars have focused on the how of leadership, rather than the why. She asked for a re-evaluation and reprioritizing of theory in leadership studies.

Appointment processes for Vice Chancellors remain an area of focus in the higher education leadership research. D.W. Sloper studied the selection of Vice Chancellors in Australia (1989), focusing on appointment processes and selection criteria. A powerfully critical article, Sloper explores how to ensure transparency and build the legitimacy of appointees. Similarly, Glynis Breakwell explored how to become a Vice Chancellor, with attention to four questions:

- What do those who appoint V-Cs look for?
- What is the empirical evidence regarding whom they choose?
- What do V-Cs say you need to do as a V-C and what do they actually do?
- What are the fundamental tasks now facing V-Cs as leaders? (2006, p. 52)

My research on the 'frontstage' of leadership only commences answering such questions. Importantly, Breakwell's research located four 'types' of Vice Chancellors: healer, motivator, fundraiser and research icon. She demonstrates that the distinctions between the transactional and transformation leadership

categories should be displaced. Instead, agility between the models is required. One of the reasons for this agility is neoliberalism. Gwilym Croucher and William Lacy Interviewed Australian higher education leaders to understand how they configure organizational practices (2020). They found that traditional academic imperatives are now framed by both marketization and academic capitalism.

Gender is a variable for consideration. Because the Vice Chancellor profiles are investigated using pre-configured categories and unobtrusive research methods, inductive reasoning will be deployed. I do not begin with a feminist lens and test this theory deductively. Instead, I configure 32 categories to monitor and then evaluate if gender is of relevance in shaping or clustering the data set. It is important for such a study of leadership to ensure that a feminist lens is not present at the start of the research. Feminism is a political view. It is not configured through a particular collection of genitals or specific presentations of hair, makeup and shoes. Indeed, my research provides an intriguing test of an early study by Baxter and Lansing (1993). They argued that women maintain different opinions from men, but when occupying leadership positions, women's behaviour replicates men. Therefore, using a standard Vice Chancellor profile and an array of categories, this interpretation by Baxter and Lansing can be probed, nearly thirty years after it was published.

Gender remains a key variable in higher education leadership studies. Paula Burkinshaw describes 'gendered leadership cultures,' stating that 'the voices of women vice chancellors have invariably been silent and strange (unusual)' (2015, p. viii). The role of women – and the ideology of femininity - remains a variable of volatility. Julie Owen's *We are the leaders we've been waiting for*, was questioning 'what I found within the 'women's leadership literature' (2020, p. 10). There is, indeed, no she-hero. However, Helen Peterson has shown the value in applying 'a critical gendered lens' to job advertisements for Vice Chancellors in Sweden. She showed how from 1990 to 2018, the language within advertisements started to change, from strength to collaboration (2018). Such a change was needed, noting Howe-Walsh and Turnbull's study about the barriers to women's leaders in academia (2016).

6. Critical University Studies

The final section of this literature review requires specific sources from Critical University Studies. These references provide the context for the modalities of leadership that frame the Vice Chancellor profiles. The literature being discussed from higher education studies focuses on the last twenty years. This period incorporates September 11 and 7/7, with the attendant xenophobia, nationalism and insularity, the Global Financial Crisis, including a recognition of the importance of governance and regulation, and the continual avoidance of it through neoliberal governments, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which exhibited the brittleness of the 'market-oriented' university sector to manage an international crisis. The irrationality and confusion of this period has framed a particularly dark and critical higher education studies. The literature is large, but I frame this study between two key, landmark books: Stanley Aronowitz's *The Knowledge Factory* (2000) and Peter Fleming's *Dark Academia* (2021).

Aronowitz configured the foundation for a different way of thinking about university leaders. He argued that higher education now has three tiers or pathways: teaching, research, and administration. The scholars who fail – or underperform – in teaching and research enter the third pathway: administration. They rule over the academics who succeed in the areas in which they have failed. While generalized and

provocative, *The Knowledge Factory* was a prescient and powerful beginning for critical higher education studies. It was matched through a transformation of understandings of the workers in this Knowledge Factory, evocatively captured through Guy Standing's *The precariat: the new dangerous class* (2013). He argued that this group of casualized higher education workers are gaining consciousness and will attack the neoliberal 'project' of higher education leaders. Other tropes were to follow, including Mehta and Maheshwari's exploration of the impact of toxic leadership (2013) and Smyth's *The Toxic University* (2017). These extended metaphors confirmed how poor leadership 'infects' the goals of higher education. Not surprisingly, this infection metaphor was itself infected by zombies. The 'Zombie University' (Brabazon, 2016) and Whelan, Walker and Moore's *Zombies in the academy: living death in higher education* (2013) are the archetypes of this extended metaphor.

While such tropes may seem extreme, the suicides of academics caused by this extreme leadership modality (Parr, 2014) is a tragic proxy, alongside a recognition that academia is an 'unsafe' working environment (McKie, 2020). This 'dark turn' in higher education has found its post-COVID 19 researcher. Peter Fleming is a scholar of work and organizational culture. It is no surprise, having moved between countries and academic posts, that the challenging context of higher education as a workplace drew his attention. His 2021 book *Dark Academia: How universities die* (2021) is as tough as the title suggests. Locating 'academic bloodletting' and 'impersonal and unforgiving management hierarchies', the dystopia presented by Fleming demonstrates the impact of neoliberalism and the consequences of 'uber-like ratings'. Benchmarking, overwork, burnout and arbitrary standards are all located.

Therefore, we return to the beginning. What leadership 'sign vehicles' are profiled by Vice Chancellors in Australian Universities? What variables and attributes are highlighted as important and valuable? From this disturbing and frequently dark literature from critical higher education studies and theories of university leadership, I hook Goffman's *The Presentation of Self* and Jean Baudrillard's 'double refusal' back this identification of a research problem.

7. Focusing the Research

Considering the turn to 'Dark Academia,' I locate and explore the Vice Chancellor 'Presentation of Self' in the Knowledge Factory. Noting the intricate theorizing from Goffman and Baudrillard, and the provocative theoretical research from higher education studies and university leadership studies, I peel back the metaphors to probe an unusual example of university media. My analysis of all the Vice Chancellor profiles in Australia's public universities reveals surprises, new knowledge and marginalization of particular values or ideologies. Four research questions organize this research. They are tethered and incrementally developed to probe if there is a 'genre' of Vice Chancellor profiles, and if it aligns with Baudrillard's theory of the 'double refusal.'

1. Are there alignments and similarities between the Vice Chancellor profiles? What are these similarities?
2. How can Goffman's presentation of self-enable an understanding of the 'frontstage' of Vice Chancellor Leadership?
3. What is not discussed, mentioned or emphasized in the profiles? Noting the tropes in higher education studies from 2000 to 2021, what interpretations can be drawn from these absences?

4. Is there a genre of Vice Chancellor institutional profiles? If there is genre, then what does it signify about higher education leadership, noting Jean Baudrillard's theory of the 'double refusal'?

The relationship between epistemology, ontology and methodology is tightly constituted in this research. Organized through an ethnographic-inductive design, I probe the system of Vice Chancellor online profiles. These short, online micro-narratives (Fraser, 2004), compose a public identity. They construct a particular way of "narrating [a] career" (Thomas, 2019, p. 19). My goal is to analyse and understand this meaning system and ponder if there are alignments to wider higher education institutional structures. The theory, interpretations and analysis are built on the search for patterns in the profiles. Therefore, unobtrusive methods are required to harvest these profiles, but semiotics is necessary to understand the signifiers, codes, behaviours, connotations and ideologies that are configured from the information extracted. The goal of the ethnographic-inductive research design, when fuelled by unobtrusive research methods, is to develop theories of leadership through the evaluation of ideologies. Through this design, my research findings will either integrate with Higher Education Studies, particularly with regard to neoliberal management (Aronowitz, 2000; Fleming, 2021), or offer critiques to how leadership is being constructed and naturalized.

8. Unobtrusive Research in Leadership Studies

Unobtrusive research methodologies are unusual in the social sciences, but are gaining renewed currency as digitization, deterritorialization and disintermediation reveal ethical questions for researchers. The sites available for unobtrusive research methods are expansive, and increasing. Giuseppe Veltri probed digital social research (2020), and unobtrusive research methods were integral to investigating these new interfaces. The originating monograph introducing these methods was Webb, Campbell, Schwart and Sechrest's *Unobtrusive measures* (1966). They argued that there were five types of unobtrusive research methods: trace data gained through the erosion of materials in the physical world, public archival material from governmentally collected data sets, privately held archival data, simple observation that codes people's public and observable behaviour, and contrived observation where people's behaviour is recorded through video and audio. The online environment has intensified and magnified the scope and scale of the textual systems available for analysis through unobtrusive research methods. From tweets to Instagram posts, from TikTok videos to LinkedIn updates, there is expansive material about daily life that is available in public for scholars to analyse.

The most cited scholar of unobtrusive research methods was – and is – best known as a scholar of death. Allan Kellehear's *The Unobtrusive Researcher* (2020) was first published in 1993 and gained a new edition in 2020. He based his interest on a revision and recognition of Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest's *Unobtrusive measures* (1966). Kellehear probed what he described as, 'the growing number of people who believe that there is, or that there should be, more to social research than either surveys or in-depth interviews' (2020, p. 6). For Kellehear, the methodological focus is to highlight, recognize, and sharpen the observation of the social world. He argued that survey instruments and interviews are founded on an assumption that if researchers ask participants about their lives, a truth will emerge through this inquiry. Yet questions about 'private,' criminogenic or 'shameful' behaviours are difficult to study through these methods. Similarly, understanding why the powerful hold and maintain power is also demanding to study. Talk-based methods must connect signifier and signified – form and content – in an

authentic or authenticating way. In terms of leadership, the gulf between actual behaviour and self-reported behaviour is vast. Further, recognizing the power differential between leaders and researchers, these methods remain safe, noting that repercussions for the researchers could be vast in terms of damage to their career if deploying reactive methods.

These methods also present disadvantages. This mode of research can locate absences and silences, but cannot add to – or augment – the already existing information. That disadvantage enables the management of ethics. Ethical concerns probe the privacy of participants and researchers, consent, confidentiality and the protection from harm of all parties. Ethical considerations must be addressed through the digitized proliferation of interfaces. As shown through Caroline Tan's investigation of 'ownership' of people, products and ideas between 'followers' and Instagram 'Influencers' (2021), the separation of 'public' and 'private' is blurring. This liminality means that, although no interviews or surveys are conducted and no person is harmed through the actions of researchers, the ethics of unobtrusive research methods must attend any research project. Because the public surfaces of a culture – analogue or digital – are the focus, personal matters are not addressed until they are presented in public in some form. That is why the theoretical infusion from Goffman's 'frontstage' (1959) is part of this project. There are no secrets revealed. No slips of the tongue. The information gathered and analysed has been presented to be read widely by an audience. Therefore, to confirm the argument from Daly, unobtrusive research methods are deployed by the 'responsible researcher' (2019).

Kellehear described unobtrusive methods as assessing 'actual behaviour as opposed to self-reported behaviour' (2020, p. 15). My research is not looking for truth or the reality of being a Vice Chancellor. Instead, it is tracking the public face of university leadership. It is probing if there is an overlap between the profiles, leading to a 'genre' of Vice Chancellors and their configuration of a 'frontstage.' The method deployed after the data has been collected is to combine the results of all 37 profiles and investigate patterns of dominance and subordination. The results are reduced to binary pairs, ordered and then configured into an ideology of leadership. Discovering truth is not the goal of this study. An understanding of the 'frontstage' of university leadership is the aim. The use of unobtrusive research methods and semiotics creates a combination of easily repeatable and verifiable interpretations. Findings can be verified, and the analysis repeated.

Unobtrusive research methods remain what Bryman and Buchanan (2018) described as an 'unconventional methodology in organization and management research.' They confirmed that methods change how questions are answered, but also allow researchers to probe 'everyday' assumptions in new ways. Andrew Knight demonstrated that unobtrusive research methods offer strong insights in the study of how an organization functions (2018, p. 64). Methodology matters because it summons what we can see, and not see. It also shapes and organizes the interpretation of that information. Therefore, I move to how these methodologies are deployed in this project.

9. Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation

All 37 profiles of Australian Vice Chancellors were harvested from the institutional websites on August 1, 2021. All analyses emerge from the profiles collected on this day. There is nothing specific or meaningful in this date selection. Some Acting Vice Chancellors are in the sample. I required a strategy

to measure the frequency of responses, but also log the absences, diversity and outliers. Unobtrusive research methods gathered information in unusual, careful and ethical ways. These are sustainable methods that do not react with or change a social setting. But once the information is gathered, how is it to be organized, understood and interpreted? The next stage is to develop a repeatable, accountable and verifiable mode of analysis of the extracted data sets. Three options are favoured in the humanities and social sciences: content analysis, thematic analysis and semiotic analysis.

Through content analysis, information is transformed through the organization of information (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017, pp. 93-99). For example, particular words could be recorded in frequency through toilet-based graffiti. Themes can be located through the researcher aligning particular components of information or textual material on a print-based advertisement. The researcher's theoretical stance is important here, shaped by symbolic interactionism (Tuckett, 2005, p. 75). Yet through the cultural studies-housed semiotic analysis, power, ideology and discourses can be revealed. For the purposes of this research project, semiotics was selected. Besides locating and recognizing signs, codes, ideologies and discourses, it also reveals the voices and ideas that have been silenced and marginalized. Pattern recognition – which is effectively activated through content analysis and thematic analysis – requires additional tools when attempting to understand the power held by the powerful. I assembled categories prior to my analysis of the data set. While content analysis could be effectively conducted from these categories, a further stage of complexity is required. That is why semiotics is necessary. Content analysis validates the appearance and frequency of a sign. Further, content analysis is often deductive, derived from a theory or hypothesis. Thematic analysis, best associated with the research of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1965), labels data into topics. Semiotics is a more 'radical version' (Kellehear, 2020, p. 58) of thematic analysis. The imperative is to interpret meaning. While best associated with Ferdinand de Saussure (1966) and Charles Peirce (1998), the methods were activated for radical political imperatives through Cultural Studies, particularly in its rendering from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s and 1980s. Stuart Hall described this process as 'encoding and decoding' (1991). This dual and duelling focus between text and society was activated by M.A.K. Halliday (1978) and then effectively tracked through the careers of Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge. Commencing with *Language as Ideology* (1979), where the title confirms the argument that language does not communicate 'neutral' meanings but highly politicized imperatives, they moved to *Social Semiotics* (1988) and concluded with Kress's project *Multimodality* (2010). It is therefore no surprise that multimodality is being used to understand the language of management and leadership (Ledin and Machin, 2015, pp. 463-481).

For my project, the interpretive stages were as follows:

- Understand the context encircling the textual system through Higher Education Studies
- Locate the texts and secure the textual systems on a particular date: the Vice Chancellor Profiles captured on August 1, 2021
- Organize the encoding and decoding relationship and data set to be gathered
- Identify binary oppositions
- Develop ideologies from the binary oppositions
- Invert the binaries to reveal the arbitrariness of the categories

- Locate absences and silences
- Probe the spaces in between the binary oppositions to show how particular ideologies are naturalized
- Present the ideology of leadership in Australian Vice Chancellor profiles and assess if they form a 'genre.'

This research project has not been previously conducted in or on any national university system. This is the first study of online Vice Chancellor profiles. Therefore, the results will provide a new lens for Higher Education Studies.

10. Results and Discussion

All 37 Vice Chancellor profiles were assessed in relation to the eight categories:

- General Information
- Qualifications
- Teaching
- Research
- Leadership
- Personal information
- Prior Professional Career
- External links off the profile page

Each profile was read and evaluated in turn, with answers to each of the questions positioned within these categories. This was the first stage of data collection through Unobtrusive Research Methods. The answers to each of these questions for the 37 profiles were recorded and the data set organized. From this stage, it was clear about how the information was being shaped, with clear absences being revealed in most profiles. However, one further stage was required. I then created a spreadsheet that would allow precise understanding and presentation of the results. From this stage, I then transformed some of the binarized categories into zeros and ones, allowing for the configuration of means and standard deviations. Finally, I created a graph, based on percentages to demonstrate the frequency with which Vice Chancellors adhered to similar tropes. These five stages of data organization may seem unusual, but they enabled a large amount of information from the 37 profiles to be organized with integrity, clarity, transparency, repeatability and verification. The results have been remarkable and stunning, which will be presented and discussed in this section, leading to the conclusion which will assess if the research questions have been addressed, and the 'frontstage' of leadership revealed through these profiles.

Research – if it is effective and considered in its design, methodology, epistemology and ontology - reveals surprises. The research literature from Higher Education confirms both the dire state of international university systems, and the problematic leadership in these institutions. From Aronowitz's *The Knowledge Factory* (2000), leadership was a 'third' pathway – outside of teaching and research – that is the recourse for the mediocre and those who failed in the core business of academic life. Through the subsequent twenty years, anecdotes and stories of toxic leadership and chaotic behaviours have peppered research, festering into Peter Fleming's *Dark Academia* (2021). This was the frame, but also the foundation for my

research. None of these studies had conducted empirical research; they were polemic, theoretical and valuable. In response, I have conducted the first research into online Vice Chancellor's profiles. The advantage of the Australian system is that no sampling was required. I was able to review and analyse all profiles of Vice Chancellors from Australia's public universities.

The results were disturbing. Firstly, the truncated size, scope and scale of the profiles was surprising. Few details were presented. The lack of information about qualifications, teaching, research, academic interests or leadership was revealed. Further – with a 100% confirmation through the entire data set – no Vice Chancellor presented any 'personal' information in any form. There was no mention of a spouse, family, leisure pursuits or interests. Therefore, 'the public' was completely separated from 'the private.' The 'backstage' was not a rehearsal for 'the frontstage'. The Vice Chancellor frontstage did not require any signs of a life lived beyond university employment. They are leaders without context, support, culture or community. They are self-made (mainly) men.

		Total	%
Vice Chancellor		37	100%
Appointed / Acting		32 / 5	86% / 14%
Word length of profile	max	866	
	min	67	
	average	296	
	standard deviation	151	
Bachelor		27	73%
Masters		13	35%
Doctorate		28	76%
Teaching Qualifications		2	5%
Teaching Awards		1	3%
Profile Picture		37	100%
First person		0	0%
Third person		37	100%
Leadership Qualifications		5	14%
Leadership accreditations		4	11%
Current research projects		2	5%
Past research projects		17	46%
Monographs mentioned		3	8%
Publications mentioned		4	11%
Date of birth mentioned		0	0%
Spouse mentioned		0	0%
Family mentioned		0	0%
Leisure mentioned		0	0%
Pronoun	SHE	13	35%
	HE	24	65%
	THEY	0	0%
Former VC		10	27%
Former DVC		23	62%
Social media links		0	0%

Figure 1: Profile aggregation at a glance

For the information that can be binarized from this table, the results have been expressed in the graph, Australian Vice Chancellors Survey Data.
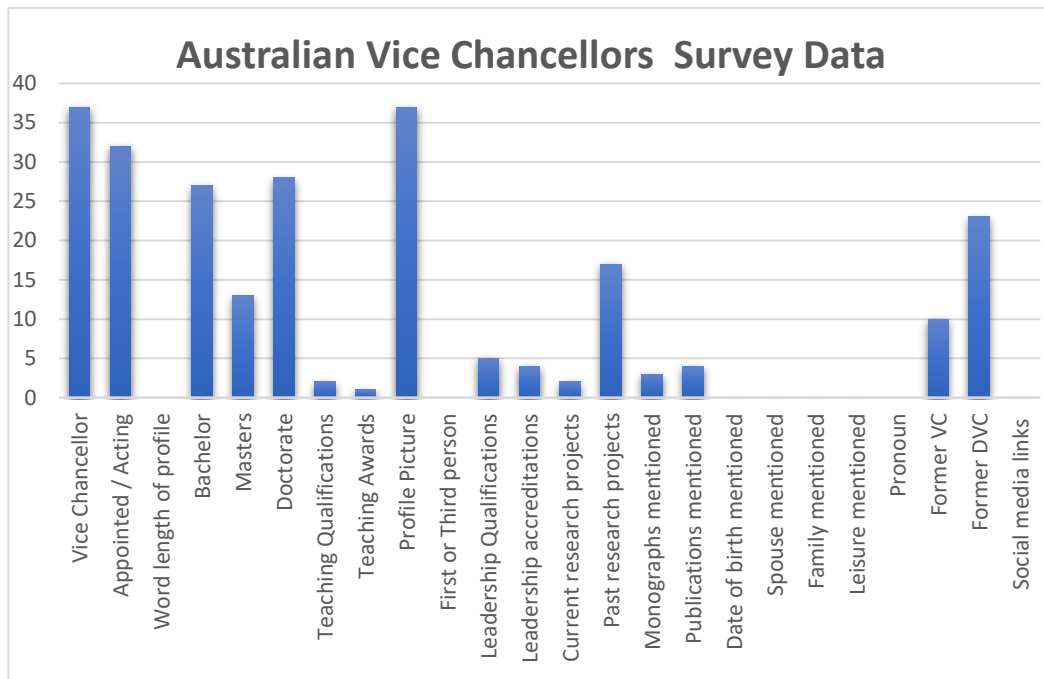
Figure 1: Australian Vice Chancellors Survey Data

The first column confirms the entire data set: 37 Vice Chancellors. All have a profile picture. Most are appointed, rather than acting. Most present some form of qualifications. Most lack teaching and leadership qualifications and accreditations. Just under half the Vice Chancellors list past or present research projects. This visual representation also reveals the profound areas of gap, absences and no presented information. Significantly, no Vice Chancellors linked out of the profile to any social media site. One Vice Chancellor – Professor Tyrone Carlin from Southern Cross University - embedded a YouTube video into the profile, but there was no outward links to YouTube itself. No LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube or TikTok links were provided in any of the 37 profiles.

Social media render digital lives porous. It is significant that all the profiles were static – Web 1.0 – presentations of self. There was no interface to enable movement, collaboration, engagement or outward contextualization of the profiles. Significantly, many of the Vice Chancellors do maintain LinkedIn and Twitter handles. However, these communication systems that enable both disintermediation and deterritorialization are not included in any profile. Once more, as with the complete absence of personal information crafted for public consumption, there is a sector-wide shared imperative to render the profiles controlled and controllable, small in length and lacking in detail.

Another crucial absence was shared by all the profile. All profiles lacked dates, including dates of birth, and the graduation dates from qualification. This meant that the profiles floated through time. It also confirmed that the Vice Chancellors did not want their ages known or approximated. This distance from lived reality was also confirmed by the use of the third, rather than the first, person in the presentation of the profile narratives. Importantly, the profiles were all short. But this brevity did vary.

Word length of profile
248
319
413
112
290
226
186
230
207
218
364
635
386
866
344
245
269
161
253
210
255
165
324
399
344
377
220
289
377
208
348
207
363
110
182
67
566

Figure 3: Length of the Vice Chancellor online profiles

The average word length of the profiles was 296.8 words, with a standard deviation of 150.8 words. I have also colour coded this table, with light green confirming above the average length. Dark green connoted the exception, that is above mean with the addition of a standard deviation. The rose shading confirms a below average length, and the dark pink is exceptional, below mean minus the standard deviation. The longest profiles belong to James Cook University's Sandra Harding, S. Bruce Dowton from Macquarie and Western Sydney University's Barney Glover. All deploy the extra word length to confirm their external partnerships with industry, and their chairing functions for corporate and public organizations. Therefore, their profiles reinforce their leadership through organizations outside of higher education. What does the length of profile mean? This is a great question. With few words, few details and references for verification can be presented.

The shortest profiles are from Scott Bauman of Charles Darwin University, Amit Chakma from the University of Western Australia and Adam Shoemaker from Victoria University. These profiles hover around 100 words. Their lack of detail is profound. The profiles of Chakma and Bauman confirm their previous Vice Chancellorships, connoting that this is the only information necessary to verify their stature. Shoemaker's profile is distinct, merely presenting his function in the organization, with very few details about his academic or leadership career. His title and role description are all that is required. Noting these outliers by a standard deviation, it is clear that there is a normative length for profiles. This will be important in the last section of this research article as I explore whether or not a 'genre' of profiles has been revealed.

From this singular data set that provides the parameters for the profile via word length, I now cluster the answers into 'Competencies' and 'Identity configuration'.

Australian Vice Chancellors - Corporate Profile Analysis				
Attribute			**Number**	**%**
	Appointed / Acting	appointed	32	86%
		acting	5	14%
	Educational Qualifications	Bachelor	27	73%
		Masters	13	35%
		Doctorate	28	76%
	Experience	Former VC	10	27%
		Former DVC	23	62%
	Teaching Expertise	Teaching Qualifications	2	5%
		Teaching Awards	1	3%
	Research expertise	Current research projects	2	5%
		Past research projects	17	46%
		Monographs mentioned	3	8%
		Publications mentioned	4	11%
	Leadership Expertise	Leadership Qualifications	5	14%
		Leadership accreditations	4	11%
Identity configuration	contains photograph		37	100%
	preferred pronoun	she	13	35%
		he	24	65%
		they	0	0%
	narrative	first person	0	0%
		third person	37	100%
	mentions	Date of birth	0	0%
		Spouse/partner	0	0%
		Family	0	0%
		Leisure/Hobbies	0	0%
		Social media links	0	0%
	Word length of profile	max	866	
		min	67	
		average	296	
		st. dev.	151	
Vice Chancellors			**37**	**100%**

Figure 4: Australian Vice Chancellors - Corporate Profile Analysis

There are few competencies held and shared by the Vice Chancellors as mentioned in the profile. No personal matters are incorporated into the 'frontstage.' What is also significant is the extreme patterning of the results. Many of the results are either zero or 100%. Again, this binarized result is important when building towards a genre of Vice Chancellor profiles. It is also clear that the binary of male and female is in place, with 65% of Vice Chancellors claiming the pronoun 'he.'

    He   she
    Male   female

Therefore, 35% of the profiles were confirmed as self-identifying women. Trans and non-binary identifying pronouns were not deployed. Because spouses were not mentioned, the sexuality of Vice Chancellors were not performed in the front stage. However, because heteronormativity is an unmarked sign, the strong binaries presented with regard to gender bleed into discussions of sexuality[2].

My final graph re-presents this information to highlight the absent information.

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[2]   I note the powerful reconfigurations of the category of 'woman' through Elise Meyer's analysis of trans* rights (2016).
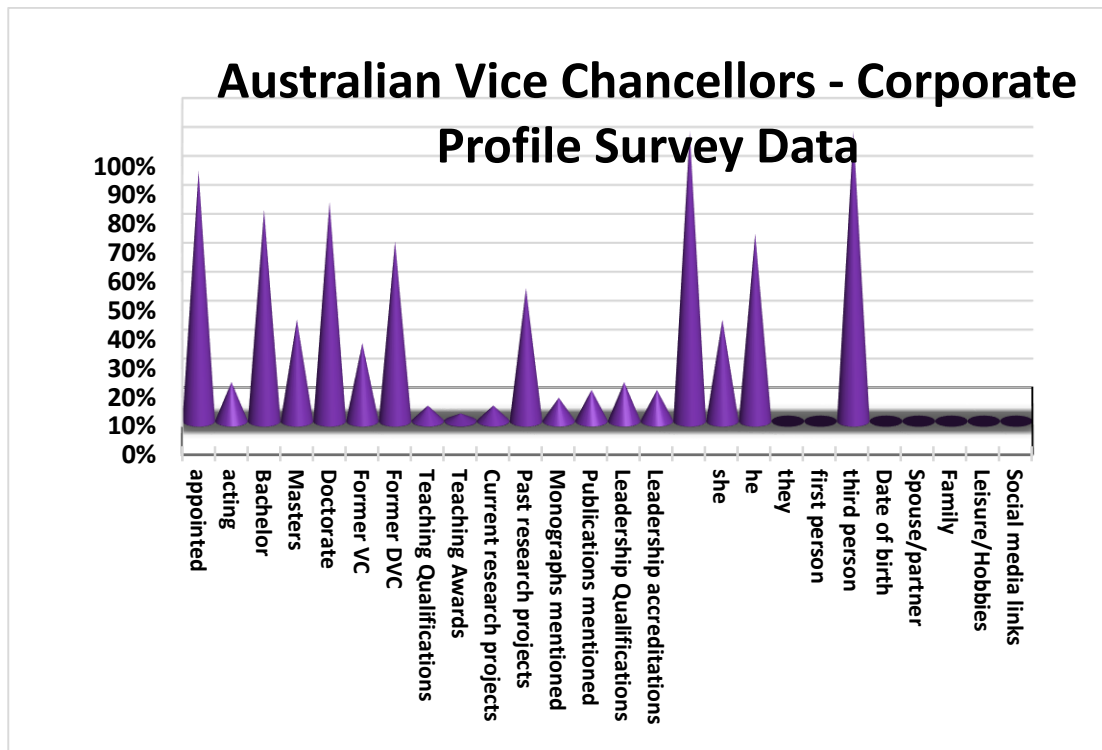
Figure 5: Corporate Profile Survey Data

The reason for these absences is becoming clear. The power held by a Vice Chancellor is presented without evidence, verification, rationale or questioning. This power and the competency held by the Vice Chancellors is not available for scrutiny or discussion. A short and generalized profile is presented. There are many readings of the odd absences from these profiles. The most obvious is that the personality, the passions, the commitments and the credibility of the Vice Chancellors is not relevant to the discourse being constructed. There is no culture or context required to shape or contextualize this power. Instead, this power and authority must be accepted, without question. In other words, the views of 'the public' – which include the academic workforce – are not relevant or important. Engagement and debate about leadership are not required. If they held a previous vice chancellorship, then no other higher education management expertise was listed. Holding a previous equivalent role was the only validation needed. Similarly, while research projects and interests were discussed in a minority of profiles, there was no links to institutional repositories, Google Scholar profiles, ResearchGate, Orcid entries, or Academia.edu. While research was mentioned at a much higher frequency than teaching, the details of the Vice Chancellor's research career was not presented to be verified.

While research was displayed in generalities, teaching expertise is not revealed in any form. Significantly, age is invisible, alongside any personal life or hobbies. One interpretation of this absence is that their career is not available for scrutiny. But the other key interpretation is that there is no space or interest in building relationships or collaborations or communication interfaces with the readers of these profiles. Therefore, the binary oppositions can be configured from the information that is presented, and that which is absent.

Vice Chancellors	Followers
Research	teaching
Men	women
Experience	expertise
Public	private
Third person	first person
individual	collective
Science	humanities
Closed	open
Strength	weakness
Control	empowerment of others
Trust	verification and testing
Credibility	questioning

The first term in each of the binary oppositions is displayed through the profiles. The brevity of these profiles demands trust through tightly controlling information, and requires creditability. The lack of links out of the profiles to social media platforms ensures that different views and perspectives are not accessed. The use of the third person creates separation from the reader, specifying strength, credibility and importance. The second term in each of the binary oppositions capture the information left outside of the profiles. If the Vice Chancellor does not provide information, then it cannot be critiqued. Weaknesses are not revealed. It is important to note that the three shortest profiles are from male vice chancellors. Women have to make the case, rather than assume the case to be a leader. Sandra Harding, the Vice Chancellor of James Cook University, demonstrates her expertise by verifying the leadership roles outside of the university sector, but also required greater length in the profile to make and indeed prove her case.

11. Conclusion

This article has revealed the ideology of the Vice Chancellors in Australia. In this controlled presentation of self, debate, discussion, community building or verification of evidence were not permitted. Therefore, the default presentation of the information is generalized and vague. Because there is so little information, personal context, history, detail or integrity checkers presented, the followers have no reason to respect, trust or connect with the Vice Chancellors.

Higher Education Studies is a discipline without the scope, scale and profile of Early Childhood Education, Primary Education and Secondary Education. These disciplines form accredited degrees and professions. Higher Education Studies does not have the degree structure or validation cycles of the earlier stages in the lifecycle of education. This means that university academics are appointed and promoted without detailed knowledge about the history of universities. A PhD is the gateway into academic life. But Higher Education Studies provides the edgy and difficult analysis of the state of our universities. This field, as confirmed by the literature review, is diverse and theoretical. It is progressivist in its politics, often anecdotal and radical in its desire for societal and institutional change. The particular slice of this literature that was relevant to this research project was the period spanning from Stanley Aronowitz's *The Knowledge Factory* (2000) to Peter Fleming's *Dark Academia* (2021). These harsh and critical books frame a particular ideology of university leadership. These are books confirming the failure of Vice Chancellors as individuals and as a mode of managing research, teaching, and engagements with the

community. Importantly though, neither of these books were empirically driven or framed. Critical University Studies is dominated by these important, high theoretical analysis, which are often polemical, but are important.

This current article took a very small component of university leadership – the Vice Chancellor's online profile – and used Unobtrusive Research Methods and semiotics to gather, organize and shape this information. This unusual slice of information allowed an empirical inflection into Critical University Studies. It also allowed me to answer some very precise and pointed questions, and provide the introduction to future work. I revealed what Louse Morley and Rebecca Lund described as 'epistemic inclusion', or 'whose/what knowledge counts' (2021, p. 117). However, from the context of this current project, I return to the research question.

Research Question 1: Are there alignments and similarities between the Vice Chancellor profiles? What are these similarities?

My research confirms that there are stark similarities between the Vice Chancellor profiles. These are particularly clustered about absences: the absence of any 'personal' material presented in the profiles, the absence of social media links, and the absence of any dates with regard to birth, publications, graduations or career changes. Further, all profiles were in the third person, separating a person and an identity from the role. Power is invested in the third person noun. It is an aloof description that configures authority and a lack of engagement or communication with others. It is definitive and blocks questioning of how and why the role has been granted to a particular individual. Also, all profiles featured a colour photograph, revealing the head and shoulders of the Vice Chancellor. They were well dressed in suits and looked directly into the camera and at the viewer. Through such a presentation, professionalism and class were confirmed.

Further similarities that were shared by the profiles was a lack of teaching qualifications, teaching experience or teaching awards. This was probably the most important result revealed through my research. The 'frontstage' of a Vice Chancellor does not require any expertise in teaching and learning to be revealed. This absence raises major questions about leadership in higher education. What makes universities distinctive as an organization is the dialogue between teaching, learning and research functions. Significantly, teaching and learning – and expertise in it – was not presented as of value or important. This absence is both stunning and worrying. It confirms Aronowitz's argument in *The Knowledge Factory* that Vice Chancellors 'rule' over the areas of academic life in which they either failed or were mediocre.

Presentations of research careers were more uneven. The similarities were not as strong in the assessment of this variable. Most profiles did not mention research at all. Most did not mention publications or previous projects. The exception to this maxim is important. The Vice Chancellor at the Australian National University had achieved a Nobel Prize. This was the foundation of his profile. Intriguingly, he had not held any other leadership role in a university, including a head of school or department, before becoming Vice Chancellor. No teaching and learning expertise were displayed. The Nobel Prize was a sufficient qualification to become a Vice Chancellor of an Australian University. However, what is significant is even this VC – as with all other profiles – did not link to Google Scholar, ResearchGate or

Academia.edu. While they mentioned research, the metrics – the accountability, transparency and verification of their expertise – were not provided in the profile.

The final similarity is the justification for the leadership role. The bulk of the words in the profile was spent listing the previous university leadership roles. Very few Vice Chancellors held any leadership qualifications of any kind. Instead, they demonstrated their leadership by listing their previous positions. Complex homological discussions must emerge from such a presentation. Expertise in higher education leadership is not required. Experience is enough. Therefore, there are alignments and similarities between the profiles. There are important characteristics that they all share. Further, there is absent information and expertise that is shared between all the publicly-facing profiles.

Research question 2: How can Goffman's presentation of self-enable an understanding of the 'frontstage' of Vice Chancellor Leadership?

Without Goffman's *Presentation of Self* (1959) and the trope of the 'frontstage,' these profiles would seem bizarre and disturbing. Rarely would profiles be assessed as a genre. The granular attention required to understand this 'frontstage' required not only Unobtrusive Research Methods but five cycles of structuring and organization to reveal the binary oppositions in place. I gained the capacity to track 'sign-vehicles' (Goffman 1959, p. 1). To return to Goffman once more:

> Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him. (1959, p. 1)

Therefore, these profiles enact a particular lens on the University as an institution. What is so powerful about my results is that I have shown how little information is presented in these profiles. The frontstage is intentionally small, highly controlled, generalized and lacking any information by which the Vice Chancellor can be assessed for his, her or their expertise and competence. Highly normative parameters are in place for the presentation of gender, the deployment of personal pronouns, and the framing of the profile photograph. This lack of information – the absences – provide the key to answering my final research question. The profiles reveal that the power held by a Vice Chancellor must be accepted without question. Authority is assumed and no further information is required. If a Vice Chancellor has previously been a Vice Chancellor or Deputy Vice Chancellor, then that is the only assurance of leadership that is require. The only exemption is with regard to the Vice Chancellor of ANU who holds no leadership qualifications, experience or expertise in any administrative role in a university, but has gained a Nobel Prize.

Research question 3: What is not discussed, mentioned or emphasized in the profiles? Noting the tropes in higher education studies from 2000 to 2021, what interpretations can be drawn from these absences?

There are many interpretations of these generalized and short profiles. There are many interpretations of the absences from these profiles. But the obvious interpretation is – and following on from Goffman – a very small 'frontstage' has been created. These are not profiles to be verified, assessed, questioned and discussed. These are profiles to be accepted, without further scrutiny. They lack depth and detail about

teaching and research, and in many cases, lack details about the most basic presentation of the qualifications they hold. The frontstage of Vice Chancellors is so small, so that the power they hold cannot be questioned. However, the consequence of this small frontstage and a contravention of the scholarly inquiry that is the nature of academic life, is that the Vice Chancellors lack credibility. Not one Vice Chancellor offered any comment about their teaching career, their curricula design or their teaching awards. Only two Vice Chancellors – of 37 – presented any form of teaching qualifications. Yet, teaching and learning remain the foundation of a university. However, it is irrelevant – excluded and removed – from Vice Chancellor profiles as both irrelevant and unnecessary to confirming the capacity to complete the requirements of the post.

Research question 4: Is there a genre of Vice Chancellor institutional profiles? If there is genre, then what does it signify about higher education leadership, noting Jean Baudrillard's theory of the 'double refusal'?

It is clear from analysing the different modes of information from all the Vice Chancellor profiles in Australia that there is genre. Particular material is shared through its absence. Teaching is irrelevant. Presenting the Vice Chancellor's research to read and interpret is irrelevant. A full life, including family, relationships and leisure, is irrelevant. Leadership is not knowledge to be learned, but experience to be performed. Aronowitz was accurate (2000). Vice Chancellorships are not promoted through excellence in teaching and research. It is a third path. Because of this lack of expertise, which is clearly revealed in the mis-steps in teaching and learning policy and research through the pandemic period, and the consequential restructures through financial hardship, there is a seismic separation between academics and those who lead them. This disengagement from readers – academic or otherwise – is what creates the disrespect and disconnection from Vice Chancellors, formulating Jean Baudrillard's "double refusal" (Baudrillard, 2010b). The refusal to lead, and the refusal to be led, severs leadership from followership, Vice Chancellors from academics.

Why would any academic who has spent their life and career dedicated to the completion of degrees, teaching and research accept the leadership of people who do not perform and value the importance of qualifications, publications, teaching and community engagement? The profiles provide no justification for the power and role held by Vice Chancellors. Leadership must be accepted. Through the pandemic, academics were asked – at very short notice – to manage an almost impossible situation. The stress and instability have been studied (Salimzadeh, Hall and Saroyan, 2021). Without professional development or infrastructural preparation, academics had to 'manage' teaching and learning.

The consequences of this double refusal to the future of higher education remains disturbing and frightening. There is no 'authenticity' to be found in these profiles. Ford and Harding were powerfully accurate: authentic leadership is not possible (2017). However, with no connection between the frontstage and backstage, the profile is not an effective proxy for believability, accountability, transparency or rigour. Academic life is currently punctuated by metrics. From the H-Index to altmetrics, from student evaluations to Rate My Professor, academics are evaluated, monitored, judged and scrutinized. While such ruses as 'freedom of speech' and 'cancel cultures' are cliches of the Alt-Right, far greater and deeper problems are present in our university. These are problems of leadership.

Profiles are a minor academic genre. They are short, yet they are public. I have researched a taken-for granted webpage and probed its meaning. I have discovered a group occupying a high position with profound responsibilities for the knowledge economy, employment, research and development, and citizenship. Yet this power is not verified. A small frontstage is presented that reduces the capacity for abuse, resistance and attack – noting the public revelations of poor, unjust or illegal behaviours from university leadership. Yet as the metrics increase on academics, the accountability and scrutiny on Vice Chancellors is decentred, hidden behind generalities, assumptions and bravado. Our nations – our citizens – deserve greater accountability and greater leadership. The question remains what is the purpose or the point of these profiles? My research project confirmed that the power held by the Vice Chancellor is assumed. The 'presentation of self' is not to be questioned, verified or checked. Conventional modes of discrimination – such as ageism – are not applied to those holding these posts, as no date of birth or the graduation year of degree are presented. This power floats through time. It does not need to be demonstrated or tethered to other data sources external to the profile. These sources cannot be controlled by the institutional marketing and communication departments.

The problem though is that this system of maintaining power has failed. A few 'bad apples' Vice Chancellors have shown that much greater regulation and accountability of the incumbents in these roles is required. Attention is required on their capacity to lead teaching and learning initiatives, in the online and offline environment. COVID-19 has demonstrated the cost and consequences of this lack of expertise. Further, the lack of training or education in leadership is stark, confirming that a charismatic leadership model is still in place. The individual power of the person – which in Australia is still older white men trained in the sciences – requires questioning of their capacity to lead an organization with complex requirements for teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. The overwhelming majority of profiles did not mention the publication of any scholarly monographs. One of the causes for this absence is that most of the disciplines from which the leaders are sourced do not value books as a measure of research excellence. Yet without interventions beyond their disciplines, how can such people lead humanities and social sciences departments in a tough political climate? If experience as a Vice Chancellor or Deputy Vice Chancellor is the most common pathway into the role, then the homology of this group is obvious. The similarities in the profiles are an inelegant proxy for the similarities in strategic plans. Research into teaching and learning is not a requirement for a Vice Chancellor. Instead, being a Vice Chancellor is the way to become a Vice Chancellor. Such a cyclical appointment structure has created the conditions for Baudrillard's 'double refusal.'

Through assessing the profiles against a series of categories developed before the study commenced, the dispassionate data collection and organization offered a careful alignment of epistemology, methodology and ontology. Because it was a small textual object, I could assess all profiles without sampling and consider if there was a 'genre'. I used semiotics to configure binary oppositions and reveal the ideologies of leadership. From this dataset, I used Goffman's theory of the frontstage to understand the 'presentation of the self' (1959). From this organization of data, it seemed appropriate to return to Stanley Aronowitz (2000) and see who is leading our Knowledge Factory. His argument was provocative at the time, but through the two decades has moved from a dystopic theoretical monograph to a view of a post-pandemic university. Yes, authentic leadership is impossible. Ford and Harding were right (2017). But without any

connection between the Goffmanesque 'frontstage' and 'backstage' (1959), there was no capacity or strategy for believability, validity, rigour or competency.

This was a small study that has enabled some complex theory to develop. It will scaffold for me a different way of thinking about university leadership. There were profound surprises, particularly the absence from teaching from the profiles and any private, family or leisure-based practices. The lack of information provided a great deal of information about how leadership is constructed. Evidence, validity and credibility did not need to be displayed or proved. Power was assumed. I now understand how these leaders continue to be hired in Australia, and how they are re-hired through multiple institutions.

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