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Stories of Female Special School Headteachers and their Experience of Headship

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of Education

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Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

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2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.

4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.

5. The word count of the thesis is 60,000.

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ABSTRACT

Stories of Female Special School Headteachers and their Experience of Headship

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Leadership positions in special schools are becoming increasingly difficult to fill and there is a significant gap in the literature on special school leadership in general. This gap in the research includes a focus on the life stories of female headteachers in these settings and situated within a constructivist paradigm. Taking a narrative approach, this study will explore the life stories of female special school headteachers, building on an understanding of their leadership journey in order to potentially act as an inspiration to others.

Detailing different aspects of the special school headteachers' experiences, the themes highlighted the complexity of the women's impressions of special school headship, the heterogeneity among the special school headteacher stories and the importance of critical reflection within their journey. Unstructured interviews were conducted with six participants. All interview transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Three subordinate themes emerged from the data: 'managing constraint', 'motivating forces' and 'perceptions of special school headship and the future'.

Drawing on Giddens' theory of social forces and his belief about the primacy of human knowledgeability over social forces, and also Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity as an intercessor between structural forces and human agency, this thesis proposes three types of special school headteacher: 'the strategic and decisive leader', 'the values-orientated professional' and 'the person-centred educator'. These ideal types illustrate the heterogeneous ways in which a small sample of women special school headteachers had reflected on, positioned themselves towards and navigated their way through the career challenges in special education. This typology together with the nuanced analysis advanced throughout this thesis offers a unique contribution to knowledge. The varying inferences for special school practice

and research were discussed and I conclude by arguing that the under-representation of women in special school headship is a complex situation, and the stories of special school headteachers merit a place at the centre of our theorising and understanding of it.

The findings reported in this thesis may be of interest to potential special school headteacher aspirants, as well as those tasked with identifying and training future special school leaders.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my brilliant creative dad, John Sykes who passed away in the middle of my EdD studies. His love of learning creatively has always amazed me and gave him good mental health and well-being, his constant smile and common sense sayings are greatly missed. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my two daughters Bethaney and Paige who both have a great lust for learning and achieving their very best.

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LIST OF ABBRIEVIATIONS

BAME   Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

DfE   Department for Education

FTSE   Financial Times Stock Exchange

HEIs   Higher Education Institutions

IPA   Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

NAHT   The National Association of Headteachers

NASUWT   The National Association of Schoolmasters and

            Union of Women Teachers

NCSL   National College for School Leadership

NPQH   National Professional Qualification for Headship

NQT   Newly Qualified Teacher

OFSTED   Office for Standards in Education, Children's

            Services and Skills

PGCE   Postgraduate Certificate in Education

QTS   Qualified Teacher Status

SENCO   Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SLT   Senior Leadership Team

UN   United Nations

WLM   Women's Liberation Movement

WomenEd   Women's Grass Movement

Glossary

Term	Definition
Agency	Throughout this thesis, the term "agency" is used to refer to an individual's "capacity for willed (voluntary) action" (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 11).
Aspiration	Drawing on the work of Young and McLeod (2001), the term "aspiration" is used to refer to what an individual hopes to accomplish during their career, the type of professional identities and behaviours they wish to perform and the types of posts they may be interested in applying for in the future. An individual's professional aspirations are perceived as being informed by a variety of factors including, but not limited to, their career history and experiences, their values and belief systems, their own agentic action as well as their life outside work. One's professional aspirations are subject to change over time.
Career	For the purposes of this thesis, the term "career" is defined as "a patterned sequence of occupational roles through which individuals move over the course of a working life" (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 61). Career moves tend to be associated with increased status and monetary rewards, yet the definition advanced within this thesis does not exclude

	the possibility of an individual changing occupations, or moving downwards or horizontally across an organisation or sector during their working lives.
Deputy Headteacher	The terms "deputy headteacher" and "deputy headship" are used frequently throughout this thesis and also "vice principals" both in other education systems and some English schools, (Kwan, 2011). These senior leaders are directly below the headteacher or principal in the school hierarchy, and occupy a prominent position in a school's leadership team. They have been defined by the UK government as playing "a major role in managing the school, particularly in the absence of the headteacher" (The National Archives, 2016).
Gender	Gender refers to socially and culturally constructed ideas regarding what it is to be male or female in our society. Derived from perceived differences between the sexes, gender not only refers to "individual identity and personality but also, at the symbolic level, to cultural ideals and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and, at the structural level, to the sexual division of labour in institutions and organisations" (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 276).

Headship	Throughout this study, the term "headship" is used to designate the post fulfilled by a "headteacher". In some of the literature cited, the synonyms "principalship" and "principal" are used. Headteachers have been defined by the UK government as having "overall responsibility for the school, its staff, its pupils and the education they receive" (The National Archives, 2016).
Special School	This thesis focuses solely on the women headteachers, working in specialist schools in England. These typically cater for pupils aged between 5 and 18 years of age. At the time of writing, mainstream, specialist education in England is made up of different types of schools. These include faith schools which are affiliated with a particular religion, community schools which are run by the local council, academy schools and free schools which are independent from local authority control. Each special school is defined by its specialism: Cognition and Learning; Communication and Interaction Disorders; Social, Emotional and Behavioural; Hearing Impairments and Visual Impairments. Children attending a special school have an Individual Educational and Health Care Plan under the SEND Code of Practice (2014).

Sex	This term is used throughout the thesis to refer to the biological differences that categorise an individual as female or male.
Structure	Social structures refer to "any recurring pattern of social behaviour; or, more specifically, to the ordered interrelationships between different elements of a social system or society" (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 740 – 741). For Anthony Giddens (1979), 'structures' are "rules and resources" produced and reproduced by human agents (p. 64). Giddens' definition of structure is explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The aims of the study

This study explores the leadership stories of women special school headteachers working in specialist schools across Yorkshire and Humberside. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, (Smith, 1996), it seeks to investigate the ways in which the participants explore their leadership story to headship, perceive, understand and make sense of the special headteacher role. Specifically, my research focuses on the particularity of individual's lived experiences and how these influence the nature of their special school headship story. The data reported on in this thesis takes the form of six unstructured interviews.

Stories of female special school headteachers and their experience of headship

1. Why do the participants decide to take their journey towards headship?
2. Are there any challenges that women must navigate in their leadership journey?
3. How do women special headteachers see their leadership story developing?

The rationale for this study stems from significant issues in educational leadership research. A concern is the under-representation of younger women in special school headship, (DfE, 2018).

Women in the teaching profession

The teaching profession is traditionally associated with and dominated by women (Drudy, 2008; Raggl & Troman, 2008; Moreau et al., 2007). The school workforce data in England (DfE, 2015a) confirm women's numerical domination of this occupational sector; women constitute 87% and 63.9% of

all classroom teachers in state-funded primary and secondary schools respectively. Yet, despite making up over half of all classroom teachers, women continue to be under-represented at the secondary headteacher level. In November 2014, only 37.1% of secondary school headteachers in state-funded secondary schools were women (DfE, 2015a). The most recent School Workforce statistics show a slight upward trend of 38% (DfE, 2018). While examining these statistics it must be borne in mind that the proportion of men and women in secondary headship has been shown to vary across regions; Fuller's (2009) analysis shows that in the London boroughs and Metropolitan districts such as Merseyside and the West Midlands women were equally represented and, in some areas, outnumbered men in headship posts, while in other areas of the country women headteachers continued to be a minority.

Despite the numerical domination of women in the teaching profession men continue to hold the majority of headteacher posts (DfE, 2018).

Figure 1: *Percentage of staff in state-funded secondary schools in England by gender*
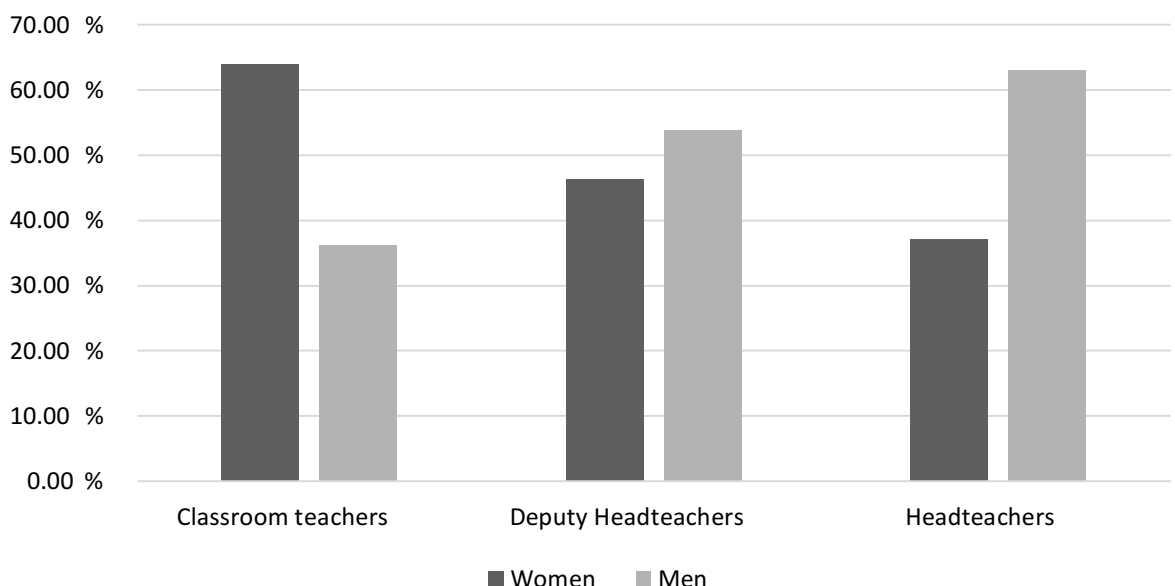
Source: DfE, 2015a

Figure 1 indicates that smaller proportions of women than men progress hierarchically to each stage of leadership in state-funded secondary schools (Allen & Rawal, 2013). This is troubling as the disproportionate representation of men in secondary headship potentially models unjust gender relations and leadership practices to young people (Fuller, 2015), reinforces gender stereotypes and sends the message to women teachers that secondary school management is inaccessible (Harris et al., 2003). Figure 1 also illustrates a relative equity between the proportion of men and women at the deputy headteacher level compared to those holding secondary headteacher posts. This statistic appears to suggest that some women deputy headteachers are actively choosing not to pursue headship or that other factors are conspiring to exclude or discourage them.

Indeed, the educational press report that an estimated 1,700 women headteachers are 'missing' from England's schools (for example, Vaughan, 2015), and that at the current rate of progress, the proportion of women headteachers in our secondary schools will not match that of women teachers until 2040 (Ward, 2016). The ongoing under-representation of women headteachers in our secondary schools is cause for concern. It sends the stereotypical message to young people that leadership "means men" (Reay & Ball, 2005, p. 145).

The DfE Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2019 will improve opportunities for flexible working, according to Hinds (2019) who argues that working flexibly will support the retention of female teachers and will attract more returners and career changes. Developing the National Professional Qualifications could be the 'golden thread' for early career teachers, (Hinds, 2019). The DfE, (2018) School Work Force in England statistics show a slight upward trend in women in headship and deputy headship positions across all phases of teaching and this is especially evident in the special school sector, however, the statistics give an uneven picture in special schools within women's age brackets and therefore, the statistics are continuing to demonstrate an under-representation of younger women in special school headship positions.

The statistics in appendix 2 (DfE, 2018), over a three-year period demonstrate minimal change despite the efforts of grassroots movement groups such as WomenEd. Even with the proposed changes I argue the picture to be "surprisingly similar across countries and cultures" (Shakeshaft, 2006, p. 500), and the variety of factors shaping and constraining senior women's career paths are well documented. They are reported to include responsibilities to children and other dependants (Conley & Jenkins, 2011), and the stereotypical alignment of leadership with masculinity (Reay & Ball, 2000), as well as negative perceptions of the headteacher role (Oplatka & Tamir, 2009). In addition to identifying potential impediments to secondary headship, researchers have highlighted several factors that motivate women to pursue educational leadership. These enabling influences are said to include the support of networks and mentors (Coleman, 2010, p. 65), and a sense of vocation and a social justice agenda (Fuller, 2012), as well as leadership development programmes and opportunities (McNamara et al., 2010). In the next chapter of this thesis, I will explore the constraining and enabling influences shaping women's leadership careers in greater detail. This discussion reveals that many of the existing studies concerned with the obstacles and facilitating factors women encounter in relation to educational leadership, focus on the views and experiences of existing headteachers; those women who have already achieved headship status. The views and aspirations of deputy headteachers have received relatively little academic attention (Harris et al., 2003). The research project described in this thesis focuses specifically on the leadership stories of female special school headteachers. I argue that special school headteachers, as women leaders, have the capability to offer new insights into some of the reasons why women leaders may or may not progress to headship.

Feminism, social change and educational leadership research

Writing this introduction in the summer of 2019 has given me the opportunity to reflect on the progress that we as a society have made towards gender equality over the past hundred years. On the one hand, a lot has been

accomplished. Women have won the right to vote and have been granted the ability to control their own fertility via reliable and readily available means of contraception (Smith, 2016; Hakim, 2000). In the professional arena, women have been granted paid maternity leave, the right to return to work after having a child, the right to equal pay and the right to work in a professional environment free from sexual harassment and discrimination (Browne, 2006). Yet, on the other hand, gender inequalities persist. Worldwide, women earn on average 24 per cent less than their male colleagues (UN Women, 2015, p. 10), and men continue to outnumber women in the most senior leadership positions in our society, including those in education (Vinnicombe et al., 2015; The Centre for Women and Democracy, 2014; Baker & Cracknell, 2014). Progress is slow, and there is more work to do if we are to put an end to gender-based inequality in our society.

The field of gender and educational leadership research has evolved over the past fifty years. Its history, as documented by Oplatka (2016), reveals several shifts in the ways in which academics have thought about and researched the under-representation of women in senior leadership posts. Below, I trace the development of this field of inquiry and signpost the social and cultural changes which have shaped its development. In doing so, I aim to situate my study in a wider social and research context to include a feminist, gender and inequality perspective.

Rationale

My rationale is based on the reported challenges of headteacher succession and recruitment in English special schools. Research suggests that headship roles are becoming increasingly unattractive to potential aspirants (see, for example, Bush, 2015; The Future Leaders Trust, 2016). The National College for School Leadership (2007) identified several reasons for this, including the perception among some educators that headship requires its holders to conform to a "rigorous regime of accountability" and meet the demands of an overwhelming, burdensome workload (p. 6). Changes to the Education Inspection Framework 2019 have further increased the level of accountability for headteachers as the new teaching and learning directives

increase teacher accountability, (DfE, 2019). Furthermore, research suggests that headteacher recruitment and retention may be more challenging in schools serving low socio-economic catchments due to the impression that heads working in such communities are at greater risk from failure and job loss than those in more affluent areas (Courtney, 2013). These ideas, explored in greater detail in Chapter Two, suggest that a number of factors may be acting to deter middle leaders, assistant headteachers and deputy headteachers from applying for headship. My study aims to explore the stories of special school female headteachers and their experience of headship, past, present and future in the context of feminism, gender and inequality, alongside the more generic concerns noted above.

It is anticipated that by listening to the past, present and future experiences of special school women headteachers new knowledge will be generated to explain the under-representation of younger women in special school headship (DfE, 2018), and will give rise to a nuanced understanding of the importance of succession planning. The identification of the factors that motivate women to pursue educational leadership is important, as is exploring opportunities for the development of networks and mentors. Another opportunity to build women leaders confidence could be to increase leadership development programmes for potential women leaders and for those already on their leadership journey. Promoting the work of WomenEd a new grassroots movement that champions women to be braver in their approach to their leadership development and by sharing the vision and values of how women leaders can build their confidence and overcome obstacles and barriers, would benefit women leaders and those aspiring towards leadership positions. Additionally, the National Professional Leadership Programmes funded by the government to support educational leaders in areas of low representation for Women, LGBT, disability and schools identified in need of school improvement, may support women in education to take their first step into leadership or progress further in their existing leadership careers.

I will engage with the leadership stories of women in special school headships to understand the challenges and facilitating factors women encounter on the road to educational leadership. My aim is by addressing the issues outlined in this chapter, the outcomes of this research, could provide opportunities to strengthen succession planning in special schools.

Sharing the stories of women leaders could provide support for women in their leadership journey and make visible role models for the future of women leaders in special education.

A brief history of special school education in the United Kingdom

This section will provide the context in which the leadership is occurring in special schools in England.

What is a special school?

A special school is a school catering for students who have special educational needs due to learning difficulties, physical disabilities or behavioural challenges. Special schools are specifically designed, staffed and resourced to provide appropriate special education for children with additional needs.

School age children with a special educational need are supported and educated within the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) code of practice and an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) will be in place from assessment until the age of twenty-five, (Children and Families Act, 2014). An Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) is a legal document which describes a child or young person's special educational needs, the support they need, and the outcomes they would like to achieve in preparation for adulthood.

The type of special school varies, some are maintained state schools, academies or independent schools. Some schools admit children from three to nineteen years, while others are primary and secondary. Assessment

nurseries are used to assess the needs of children with or without a diagnosis of special needs.

The Children and Families Act (2014) lists four broad types of special school according to their specialism:

- Communication and Interaction
- Cognition and Learning
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health
- Sensory and Physical needs

Some special schools are generic, catering for a wide range of needs, including some or all of the broad specialist areas (p.4). Other special schools support children with autistic conditions and language and communication disorders. Mainstream schools provide specialist units within the school or an Integrated Resource enabling personalised learning programmes to be tailored to suit the children's individual needs. A difference between special and mainstream schools is that special schools have a higher staff ratio, due to the additional needs of students with a learning disability.

Special schools provide a range of interventions including speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, school nurses, specialist swimming teachers, and teaching assistants who have been trained to use interventions such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Makaton and Rebound Therapy.

Many special schools have specialist resources and equipment including hydrotherapy pools, sensory rooms, and adapted outdoor play equipment. Classes in special schools are small and teaching is personalised to individual needs and abilities.

Maintained special schools follow an adapted National Curriculum that is broad and balanced. Non-maintained schools such as academies, free schools and independent schools are not required to implement the National Curriculum, and are able to design and develop their own educational

systems and structures. Speilman's (2019) Ofsted framework is based on developing depth within the curriculum subjects and a redesign of the curriculum is an expectation for all schools in England. This includes special schools.

> Serious attention to curriculum is just as important for the children with special needs and disabilities. A child with severe or complex needs may well take longer to acquire and build that knowledge than other children.

> For children with SEND, the decisions that leaders make about the curriculum make a huge difference. (Speilman, 2019, p. 1)

The delivery of Ofsted's new framework requires strong authentic leadership that is distributed at all levels (p.1).

What is a special school headteacher?

A special school headteacher is the most senior teacher and leader of a school, responsible for the education of all SEND children, management of staff, and for school policy making. Special school headteachers lead, motivate and manage staff by delegating responsibility, setting expectations and targets and evaluating staff performance against the special school strategic plan and adhering to the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014).

Special school headteachers ensure that there is a suitably experienced and qualified teacher designated as a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) for the school.

Consulting with the local authority and governing body is essential to the role of a special school headteacher ensuring policies and procedures are adhered to within the legal framework of the SEND Code of Practice. The special school headteacher ensures that children with a special educational need join in the everyday activities of the school together with their peers and by using all available resources efficiently.

Where a local authority or a first tier tribunal directs an application for admission using the SEND legal framework, and names a maintained special school the special head and governors have a responsibility to admit the named child to the school.

Headteachers of special schools cooperate with the local authority in developing the Local Offer and Educational Health Care Plans including the reviewing of the plans. EHCP's are reviewed annually. Schools are responsible for early reviews where a child is transferred to a different provision.

Special school headteachers ensure the school produce the SEND information report in accordance with section 69 of the Children and Families Act (2014) and to ensure the school has arrangements in place to support children with medical conditions, (section 100, Children and Families Act, 2014). They also ensure this is published on the school's website. Special school headteachers have the role of designated safeguarding lead with delegated duties to safeguarding deputies.

Background to special school leadership issues and challenges

There is a crisis in the recruitment of headteachers in the United Kingdom, where declining numbers of applicants to the primary, secondary and special school headship indicate a gap between supply and demand (NCLSCS, 2012). Ball (2013) argues for teachers and leaders to make themselves more effective (p.125). Changes to the school delegated budget and the high needs funding block for SEND children gives special school headteachers further challenges regarding the provision of personalised learning for all children. The delegated budget strategy conflicts with the concepts of the new Ofsted (2019) framework whereby a rich and in-depth subject based curriculum is provided for all schools. Major issues concerning inspection, measures of accountability, competition, external interference and resulting in policy change, serve to demotivate prospective leaders (Apple, 2010, p. 36).

Many of the issues and challenges faced by headteachers of special schools are the same as those leading any other school and include the neo-liberal agenda outlined by Ball (2013). However, there are some issues which are particularly pertinent to special schools.

During the past decade special schools have continued to work on school improvement initiatives and their leaders have needed to respond to the changing role and meet the needs of their current students (Male, 2011; Burnett, 2003). A review of literature by Ainscow (2003), has been highlighted by Scott and McNeish (2013), stating the need for leadership to enable special schools to provide high quality education in existing circumstances, while at the same time developing new roles. Rayner et al. (2005) similarly argue that the special school is a unique form of provision and that its place in the education system is particularly vulnerable. Rayner et al. (2005) concludes by stating that leaders need to meet the challenge, not only of remodelling its workforce, but also of reforming its educational function. The remodelling was the beginning of new partnerships and school to school support work between mainstream primary and secondary schools.

Ashdown and Darlington (2007) have reflected on these issues and emphasise the importance of staff preparation, team-building and consultation with staff at every stage. Ainscow et al. (2003) also identified collaboration as particularly important with the need to build cooperative teams and effective partnerships with professionals from different disciplines, and with parents. They observed the need for shared leadership, with the headteacher seen as a leader of leaders rather than the sole leader. They also argued that those in headship roles in special schools should seek to develop organisational cultures that encourage experimentation and collective problem-solving.

A small scale study carried out by Baker (2009) involved interviewing nine special school headteachers for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The headteachers were asked to identify the main challenges of their current context. Constant change, relentless school improvement,

funding concerns, bureaucracy, and maintaining a balance between work and private life were all key issues cited by school leaders. The perceived opportunities cited in the study included partnership links with other schools and outreach services to mainstream schools. Baker (2009) makes recommendations for headteachers of special schools to work in partnership with local mainstream schools requiring support with SEND students, reflect the school's vision within the school community with an outward facing perspective and to maintain a positive work/life balance in order to avoid burn-out. (Baker, 2009, p.195).

Special school headteachers have recognised the need to respond to the changes in educational policy (Scott & McNeish, 2013). This practice has also been noted in other countries such as Australia, by O'Brien (2010), who investigated the leadership skills, abilities, knowledge bases and overall capability required for successful leadership of special schools. He compared the perspectives of the special school principals in the study with those of mainstream principals investigated by previous research. O'Brien (p.45) noted that special school principals emphasised personal and interpersonal abilities more than the mainstream principals did. This point is also echoed by Bateson (2013) who suggests that one of the distinctive features of leadership in special schools is recognising that the cognitive and behavioural domains of students can only be addressed if the affective domain is also taken into account. This may be through forming relationships, designing the provision around the student, judging the behaviour and not the person, looking to praise, not to condemn and being prepared to lose face in the face of unconventional and challenging communication and behaviour.

A recent challenge for special school headteachers in England has been the decision over whether to apply for academy status. This was made available to special schools in 2010 with the first special school academies created in 2011. The different funding arrangements of special schools and their relationships with local authorities makes this a more complex proposition than for most mainstream schools (Scott & McNeish, 2013).

A number of factors have combined to create a complex set of challenges for special needs education. Firstly, the 2014 legislation which saw the advent of the EHC plan was not accompanied by funding that could support the extra bureaucratic burden. Secondly, the DfEs Austerity Policy, (2014) has severely reduced the number and quality of local authority staff able to deal with the additional demands of EHC plans. Thirdly, the ongoing increase in the number of academies replacing local authority controlled schools has meant that resourced provision in mainstream settings for youngsters with EHC plans has not developed in sufficient quantity. Hence LEAs are placing increasing reliance on expensive non-maintained provision for students with more complex needs. While this provision is often of high quality, it is significantly more expensive than utilising local resources. In addition, many local authorities have not been equipped to take advantage of the opportunities to work with maintained schools in creating local SEND settings. These could in many cases replace their out-of-authority residential counterparts in the non-maintained sector.

The SEND issues outlined pose a challenge for special headteachers with regards to becoming academy schools. However, female special headteachers working together collegiately, could rise to the challenge to bring together special schools to create school improvement opportunities, economies of scale and shared practice in preparation for redesigning the curriculum within the new Ofsted framework from September 2019. Linking to Teaching Hubs and developing outreach services could create possibilities for improving the outcomes of SEND children in special and mainstream settings.

Succession planning in special schools

In the United Kingdom, there have been longstanding concerns relating to the availability of appropriately trained specialist teachers and the lack of specialist training opportunities for those in special education (Mittler, 2000). Male and Rayner's (2007) study suggested that this was still the case, particularly for those working with students with profound and multiple

learning disabilities.   As well as recruiting and retaining specialist teachers and other staff, special school headteachers also have the challenge of succession planning to ensure the development of future leaders.

Scott and McNeish (2013) explain that attracting high quality people into headship can be a challenge across all educational settings. In two studies detailing the declining attractiveness of headship in general, NCSL (2006) found almost one-third of primary and secondary headships were re-advertised because no suitable candidates were recruited. These studies suggested demographic causes for this, with nearly a quarter of headteachers aged over fifty-five (DfE, 2018) and a lower than average number of teachers in the next generation, from which new school leaders would normally emerge. Smithers and Robinson (2007) suggested other significant factors making headships less attractive, including workload, too many government initiatives, excessive accountability, vulnerability to dismissal through poor Ofsted reports and insufficient pay differentials.

A survey by Rhodes and Brundrett (2006) was highlighted by Scott and McNeish (2013) stating that *"little evidence of proactivity"* (p.11) in the identification of leadership talent early in a teacher's career. They identified personal and professional confidence as a barrier to leadership succession, with middle teachers agreeing that there needed to be a balance between active preparation for the next role, and patronage by a decision maker - usually the headteacher. The heads surveyed identified a number of effective mechanisms for in-house leadership development, which included a degree of empowerment, support, controlled risk taking, accountability via project work, work shadowing and networking. Scott and McNeish (2013) stated that although headteachers were aware of the factors thought to assist in motivation and retention they were unclear as to the role of their leadership style and professional culture in encouraging leadership retention in their schools.

A key element of the National College's succession planning programme is encouraging heads and governing bodies to develop *"grow your own"* strategies. Bush (2011 p. 8) identified the main factors undermining

succession planning: capacity – especially lack of time; funding and budgets; perception of headship, NPQH (though this is no longer mandatory); and resistance to new models of leadership in some local authorities.

Shaw (2006) identifies the important role of continuous development for potential and special school leaders. He suggests that leadership development for special schools needs to include both generic as well as specialist development. His survey of special school leaders found that half of the respondents valued generic professional development over context specific programmes. According to Shaw (2006) leadership development was seen as more important in determining effective headship than management training, and much more important than special needs training. Moreover, Shaw's (2006) study concluded that context specific issues cannot be ignored, and therefore participants from special schools on generic leadership programmes should be offered additional modules or experimental learning through mentoring, networking and peer learning groups as it is difficult to find common ground when all other participants are from mainstream schools.

The importance of mentoring and coaching has been identified for special school staff. Bubb (2009) describes the experience of coaching in a special school and argues that this is a useful approach for making teachers and support staff develop their skills and feel more valued.

The history of policy and practice of leadership and SEND: relating to a special school context

Legacy of the Warnock Report 1978
In the past ten years the UK government has published education policies aimed to create a system focussed on meeting the needs of 'every child' within a competitive market environment. The White Paper; Education Excellence Everywhere (2016), DfE, (2016), identified progression within the SEND agenda since the Warnock Report (1978). The significance of the Warnock Report of forty years ago goes beyond the deliberations, recommendations and the policy, practice legacy and impact. Warnock's

landmark 1978 report on special education accelerated legislation that enshrined the policy of inclusion and changed the way we talk about disability.

Warnock (1978) introduced the statement assessment of SEND children, which gave rise to the Education Act (1981). The Act ensured Local Authorities assessed children under the new legislation and gave parents the right to appeal. Subsequently the Education Act (1981) was amended and refined in 1993 and 1996. The new SEND Code of Practice issued legal responsibilities to schools and their governing bodies. A multidisciplinary approach to SEND was introduced.

The 2001 Special Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001), reinforced the government's commitment to the inclusion of SEND children in mainstream schools. In 2014 the Children and Families Act and new SEND Code of Practice was introduced. The new SEND reforms ensured that legally each child received an Education and Health Care Plan with an annual reviewing process. The Warnock Report (1978) changed education and how far it has unpinned much of what we do today in terms of personalisation for children with a special education need. The Warnock Report remains relevant as it marked a fundamental shift in discourse on special needs and disability, and accelerated progress towards an inclusive approach to education.

The history of SEND education and policy of leadership and management development in England is cited from 1972 until the mid – 2000s and has been captured by Simkins (2012). He discusses the era of leadership development since 1997. The history of this period showed central government to be active in developing policy in the area of leadership and management development for the first time. He cited tension between the need to coordinate provision in response to the needs of policy changes for schools and a belief in the effectiveness of markets or organising provision.

The Third Way ideology

The Third Way ideology of New Labour education has demonstrated politics of left and right wing ideas, towards the economic realities of globalisation.

The Third Way stands for a modernised social democracy, passionate in its commitment to social justice. The term Third Way has gained a wide currency, however, it is said to be controversial. On one hand, either explicitly or implicitly, it appeared to have become the guiding idea of parties and government, seeking to move beyond both old left thinking and neo-liberalism. Giddens (1998) has been seen as the 'Guru' of the Third Way (see Giddens, 1998; 2000). The Third Way is the political philosophy of Tony Blair and New Labour, with Giddens seen as a forceful defender.

The Third Way thinking has in fact promoted the interests of multi-national corporations. The idea that the 'knowledge economy' has changed capitalism fundamentally or offers new opportunities as suggested by Third Way theorists. The 1997 Labour government introduced a modernisation agenda. New opportunities in leadership growth in education became evident. The market system introduced the National College of School Leadership. Research conducted by the National College identified a 'grow your own succession plan' with the concept for changing leadership in schools. The first courses in leadership to be introduced were 'Leading from the Middle', National Qualification for Headteachers which was mandatory and the Aspiring Specials School Leadership Program.

Simkins (2012, p. 2) argued that the outcome was a classic case of 'Policy Steering', identifying that central funding symbolised the policy significance of management development and training and the de-centralisation of provision reflected market principles. The severe pressures placed on the system by legislation had the effect of forcing provision in the desired direction (p. 3). Alongside these developments Simkins (2012) alludes to the fact that the government were clearly considering a more interventionist stance. Although the reforms of the late 1980s were in motion, it was no longer enough (p. 625). Political concerns about the performance of the school system had not gone away. The Labour Government of 1997, introduced a 'modernisation' agenda, which built on the Conservatives' Framework of School autonomy and accountability, but adding a further

ingredient 'leadership' (p. 629). This move was incorporated in the development of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2000. NCSL launched a 'leadership development framework', which comprised of five stages of school leadership and learning programmes linked to the framework. This included Leading from the Middle (LFTM), Leadership Pathways for Senior School Leaders, National Professional Qualification for Headteachers, (NPQH) and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH).

A special edition of Educational Management Administration and Leadership was devoted to the College in 2004 and in addition evaluations of the licensed leadership programmes were carried out. Authors such as Southworth (2004) and Simkins (2012) have described and analysed ways in which the National College were trailblazers of innovative leadership development programmes. Simkins (2012) further described the advocacy and support of networked learning communities, the extensive use of modern technologies and comprehensiveness of its programmes.

In response to the articles in the 2004 special issue, Southworth (2004, p. 345) stated that the National College had estimated a potential following of 250,000 leaders and potential leaders. Southworth (2004, p. 349) argued that programmes alone cannot meet or serve the needs of all these leaders; "the scale of the task is too great". In response to the growing interest in leadership programmes, Southworth (2004) highlighted a number of themes that have been instrumental in the college's work over the years including the significance of distributed leadership and the importance of developing the capacity of schools to contribute to meeting the scale of leadership development required for school improvement. Simkins (2012) concluded by stating that by 2010 the landscape of leadership development for schools in England had been transformed.

As Government concerns about the performance of the school system grew and the concept of administration was replaced by 'management' and then 'leadership', Simkins (2012, p. 622) says a "fragmented" system of leadership and management development operated "independently of

government support or interface had over a period of less than 20 years been completely transformed", (p. 626). In conclusion, first a market system had been introduced and in addition, a number of intervention initiatives were explored, particularly the NPQH, which was phased in as a mandatory qualification for new headteachers from 2004.

National Professional Leadership Qualifications are promoted by licensed providers such as Teaching School Alliances and commissioned providers such as the 'Best Practice Network'. In 2018 the government targeted National Professional Qualifications funding towards under-represented 'hot spot' areas across England to support succession planning and grow leadership in areas where more schools are in the Tier one and Tier two categories within the Ofsted grading framework, this is for schools in the 'Requires Improvement' category. In addition, the new National Professional Qualification for Executive Headteachers was introduced in March 2018 and the first cohort graduated in August 2019. This initiative has the potential to support the growth of special school leaders over time.

My educational and professional biography

I am a practicing special school headteacher and I became an assistant headteacher when my own children were aged 8 and aged 11 years. Leadership with young children has its constraints and has presented challenges when dealing with the bureaucracy and maintaining a balance between, work, childcare and a work life balance. I have also forfeited my leisure time in terms of going to the gym or exercising. During my leadership journey to headteacher, I have been juggling my own young children and as they have grown older I have taken on more responsibility as a headteacher in a special school. I have become more agentic when I became a National Leader of Education and able to support other leaders with their school improvement.

The focus for the study and leadership lens through which I view the findings are grounded in my own life history and identities as a woman, a teacher, and special school headteacher. My initial interest in the topic of this thesis

grew out of my own experiences and observations when teaching and leading in mainstream secondary schools and special schools in Yorkshire (1995 – 2020). Therefore, my interests are firmly centred around studying female headteachers' experience of headship. Many able women I know typically progressed to middle leadership positions but no further, or would progress quickly in the first part of their careers, and come to a halt after starting family.

Most of my teaching years were spent working in a school with a male headteacher and a male deputy and two male assistant heads. In six of the schools worked within my career I have only worked for one female headteacher. The male leaders I have encountered have all been competent, but I often wondered what skills were being lost to the school (and others) by the absence of women in senior leadership roles.

Whilst the focus for my thesis has grown out of my experiences as a secondary mainstream and special school teacher, the EdD process has been a personal journey for me in ways I could not have anticipated. As well as developing as a student and a researcher, by studying leadership styles and traits and listening to the stories of female headteachers and their experience of leadership, I have come to gain new insights into my own career development. I have drawn on the narratives of headteacher leadership experiences through case study research using ninety-four responses of special heads in schools in England, (NCSL, 2007).

The stories of female special school headteachers are differentiated by their personal headship experiences and challenges, from class teacher to headship past, present and future. In retrospect, I am aware that during my secondary school teaching career I wavered between two extremes. Whilst I actively sought out developmental experience and applied for promoted posts, at the same time I lacked self-belief and sought reassurance, advice and encouragement from senior colleagues. Fundamentally, at the time, I probably did not see myself as capable of achieving leadership positions. Nonetheless, my career progression was fluid and successful. I gained my first promotion after three years, becoming head of department in a different

school. Two years later I became pastoral lead for years seven and eight. I was becoming more responsible and accountable. I spent my final year in that school in a senior teacher post, as a member of the senior leadership team, with responsibility for student welfare and discipline.

Around that time, I applied for a few assistant head positions. I was successful on my second interview, on reflection I felt lucky as the assistant head position is often most difficult to achieve in school leadership. Looking back now, I recall that my professional self-esteem and confidence at the time depended largely on others opinions of me, in particular the view of senior colleagues. With a greater sense of belief in my own abilities and my own potential as a leader, and less time spent prevaricating and awaiting the support and approval of colleagues, I felt my leadership opportunities were becoming greater.

This realisation has come to me only relatively recently, and is connected to the enhanced understanding of my own authentic leadership style and my effectiveness in performing specific tasks. On reflection I feel that I have grown my self-efficacy throughout my leadership and doctoral journey.

As is the case for most people serendipity has also played a part in my leadership journey. A crucial factor was that in 2005, I was seconded as assistant head to set up an Inclusion Unit in a large secondary school with 1300 students, a ten form entry school. Third generation poverty within the catchment community led to many challenges in the school and a high level of outside agency intervention. Substance misuse, gangs and child sexual exploitation were risks within the local community. As Assistant Head for Inclusion, I was keen to promote positivity for the students and to celebrate success at every level. This did little to raise the spirits of demoralised staff, dealing with the problems of warring populations of students from three council estates traditionally at loggerheads with each other, and rapidly declining standards of behaviour.

By December 2015, the Inclusion Unit was open to pupils, and the team I was working with had used new intervention strategies to develop with me a

truly inclusive learning space to support the most vulnerable students. From that point on, I took control of my career with a renewed determination to support vulnerable learners and to make a real difference to their lives, by using strong and effective leadership, to develop and resource learning areas to support students at risk of exclusion.

The features of my leadership journey so far gave me a determination that meant I was relying on my own resources rather than soliciting the encouragement and advice of senior colleagues, as I had in the past. I should also add that, in common, interestingly, with many of the headteachers in this study an important factor for me has also been that I have been fortunate in having a supportive partner, from whom I have drawn strength throughout.

In the assistant head position, I moved into the special school sector, equipped with increased self-efficacy, as I had been instrumental in shaping and developing specialist school learning environments for the past ten years. My current headship has also given me scope to develop a special through school from the primary to secondary phase. My understanding of my own career approach in retrospect resulted largely from a process of reflection during the EdD programme, as I made sense of the leadership stories told by other female special school headteachers.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce the reader to special school leadership and practice, outlining the purpose of special schools and special school leadership including the SEND Code of Practice and government policy regarding the Children and Families Act (2014). I have further explored the background of special school leadership issues and challenges and why succession planning in special schools is important. I have detailed the growth of National Professional Qualifications, and have drawn on the input of the National College to demonstrate how support from the College has sustained NPQ leadership pathways.

Finally, I have reflected on my positionality to give clarity within the context of my chosen research. I shall draw upon aspects of this introductory chapter in the discussion and analysis of my findings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

"Gender equality is a human rights obligation that remains vastly unfulfilled".

(UN Women, 2015, p. 234)

Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrates my proposed research and details the main focus of the thesis. The second chapter relates to what is known about women teacher leaders, their career stories and professional aspirations. Taking a critical stance, it begins by understanding women's position in the labour market.

The chapter focuses on the teaching profession including the representation of women in special school headship demonstrating that women are under-represented in leadership across all phases of education. There is a distinct lack of literature and research relating to women leading in a special school context, however, the School Workforce in England (DfE, 2018) statistics show women holding special school headship positions over the age of forty-five are more prevalent than men and interestingly, the statistics demonstrate men declining their special school headship from the age of fifty and more women carrying on their headship until the age of sixty-five. (DfE, 2018). There is an under-representation of women in special school leadership between the ages of thirty-five and thirty-nine years showing a lack of succession planning in younger women, see appendix 2. The second section of this chapter centres on theoretical and empirical studies showing the constraints that women face during their careers, and in addition the enabling factors that influence their career decision making. It discovers a variety of issues including family responsibilities, stereotyping and generalisation, social and cultural expectations, including self-confidence.

The final section of the chapter focusses on the concepts of agency, structure and reflexivity in the context of female special school headteachers. Here I explore the theory of feminism and the relationship between feminist theory, experience and research exploring Stanley and Wise (1993), Anthony Giddens' (1991) theory of structuration, and Margaret Archer's

(1995) work on the internal conversation. The third section critically assesses the applicability of each of the theorist's work to my project. I conclude this chapter by outlining my theoretical framework.

Literature review search strategy

The following databases were used to search for relevant literature: British Education Index (BEI), Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Business Source Premier, Emerald and PsyINFO. All databases were searched using the terms found in Appendix 1.

These search terms were generated using my research questions as a guide. These are:

1. Why do the participants decide to take their journey towards headship?
2. Are there any challenges that women must navigate in their leadership journey?
3. How do women special headteachers see their leadership story developing?

The challenges and constraints faced by female aspirant headteachers

This section focuses on the challenges and constraints faced by women aspiring to headship. Researchers have investigated the under-representation of women in educational leadership in a variety of contexts, (for example, Chabaya et al., 2009; Young & McLeod, 2001; Lacey, 2004; Coleman, 2002; Chaudry, 2019). Consequently, there is a strong evidential literature identifying and discovering the barriers that women face on their road to headship (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). The variables that form and hinder women's careers include family and caring responsibilities (for example, Coleman, 2002; Moreau et al., 2007; McNamara et al., 2010; Conley & Jenkins, 2011). Stereo bias and discrimination, (for example, Coleman, 2003, 2007; Thornton & Bricheno, 2009; Blackmore et al., 2006), self-perceptions and a lack of confidence, (for example, Lacey, 2004; Munoz

et al., 2014; Cubillo & Brown, 2003), perceptions of the headteacher role and the educational landscape, (for example, Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Smith, 2015; Bush, 2015). Draper and McMichael (2003a, pp. 190-192) suggest that the factors that influence career decision making can be considered on four levels.

Level 1: Individual (those related to family, socialisation and lived personal experiences)

Level 2: School specific (those concerned with the nature and appeal of particular school environments)

Level 3: Systemic (those related to educational policy and the public profile of the role)

Level 4: Generic (those related to special school headship, its opportunities and disincentives).

In reviewing the literature on the challenges and constraints facing women teachers and leaders, I will explore each of the four levels suggested in this model.

Level 1: Individual perceptions

The metaphors of constraint

A number of metaphors are used throughout the literature to demonstrate the constraints women face in the workplace. The 'glass ceiling', popular in the 1980s, is arguably the most common of these and is said to show "an invisible barrier for women and minority groups, preventing them from moving up the corporate ladder" (Weyer, 2007, p. 483).

Some academics believe that the neo-liberal organisations in which we work and the post-modern careers we enact may demand more complex metaphors than the 'glass ceiling'. Eagly and Carli (2007) suggest that the concept of the glass ceiling fails to take into account the complexity of women's careers in a number of ways. The authors' criticisms of this metaphor can be found in Figure 2.

Taking a feminist perspective

My project, its aims and research questions are informed by the political and ethical thinking of feminist academics, such as Stanley and Wise (1993). As I discussed in Chapter 1 and show in my theoretical framework, feminism is not a singular belief or social movement. Feminist knowledge positions originate from a variety of value judgements and experiences in our society (Letherby, 2003; Brisolara, 2014). For the purposes of my work, I define a 'feminist perspective' as one that challenges and critiques male privilege.

It is a view that is rooted in the belief that we live in a society in which patriarchal power structures, androcentric bias and the oppression of women persists (Stanley & Wise, 1993). The feminist perspective will be adopted throughout this thesis by adopting three key themes, 'women are oppressed', 'personal is political' and 'feminist consciousness' (Stanley & Wise, 1993). The most central and common belief shared by all feminists, whatever our type, is that all women are oppressed. It is from this acknowledgment that there is a problem in the treatment of women in society, that feminism arises. It is a fact that all feminists accept that women are oppressed on the basis of their own experiences and those shared with other women. Furthermore, feminists agree that women's oppression is not inevitable, but that it can be changed.

The second theme, that 'personal is political', builds on the point that women's oppression is the basis of our own and other women's experiences, outlining the fact that oppression involves a shared set of experiences and is concerned with the nature of this experience as it is shared and understood in terms of the person. The emphasis on the personal within feminism is summed up by Stanley and Wise (1993) who argue that power and its use can be examined in this way. They emphasise that 'the system' is experienced in everyday life, and is not separate from it. In this thesis the stories of special school women leaders will be examined and understood through exploration of leadership stories and experiences in their working lives.

The third theme demonstrates the new understandings that women gain through consciousness raising activities. This involves seeing reality differently, women's understanding of their lives can be transformed so that they see, understand and feel them in a different way. This means that women are able to see clearly the contradictions that are present in their lives, this is 'feminist consciousness'. The three themes 'women are oppressed', 'personal is political' and 'feminist consciousness' can be interpreted according to our own situations and understandings.

The 'feminist perspective' underpinning my work centres on the belief that all human beings regardless of their differences are of equal worth, and should be treated as such (Freedom, 2002).

Figure 2: *Criticisms of the glass ceiling metaphor*

It erroneously implies that women have equal access to entry–level positions.

It erroneously assumes the presence of an absolute barrier at a specific high level in organisations.

It erroneously suggests that all barriers to women are difficult to detect and therefore unforeseen.

It erroneously assumes that there exists a single, homogeneous barrier and thereby ignores the complexity and variety of obstacles that women leaders can face.

It fails to recognise the diverse strategies that women devise to become leaders.

It precludes the possibility that women can overcome barriers and become leaders.

It fails to suggest that thoughtful problem solving can facilitate women's paths to leadership.

Source: Eagly and Carli, 2007, p. 7

Metaphor will be used to examine the hidden comparisons and the shared characteristics, to understand why women are under-represented in leadership positions.

In view of these criticisms, Eagly and Carli (2007) propose the alternative and more complex metaphor of the 'labyrinth' to account for women's limited representation in the upper levels of organisations. The occupational 'labyrinth' through which women pass is said to contain both 'paths to the top' and numerous barriers to women's advancement. It is said to include "no exclusionary laws and few clear-cut, widely endorsed norms of exclusion" (p. 6). Other academics have proposed the technological concept of the 'firewall' to explain women's under-representation in leadership positions (Bendl & Schmidt, 2020). This metaphor is also said to be more complex and fluid than the 'glass ceiling' having "the advantage of elasticity and permeability" (p. 629).

In addition to the concept of the labyrinth and the firewall, Ryan and Haslam (2005) have suggested that women confront a precarious 'glass cliff' in the labour market as they are more likely than their male counterparts to be appointed to leadership positions in "problematic organisational circumstances" (p. 87). It seems therefore that there are numerous challenges and constraints women face in the labour market. Coleman (2011) argues, however, that regardless of the metaphor academics utilise "the conclusion is still that discrimination against women continues and that woman's traditional role in the family is an impediment to career success" (p. 27).

Another dimension to the metaphor is presented by Chaudry (2019), her notion of the glass ceiling in education is stated as a reality, however, Chaudry (2019) presents new information as the educational landscape has changed. The national picture hides the reality of system leadership, Chaudry (2019) states that data is not collated or reported on positions above the level of the named headteacher of a school. The hidden reality of system leadership demonstrates there is often an "executive headteacher above the substantive headteacher and a Chief Executive Officer above the executive headteacher" (p. 56). Chaudry's (2019) insights are of interest to this research project as this means that despite securing headship, the glass ceiling above some female leaders is "silently being reinforced" (p. 62).

Chaudry has written for WomenEd (2019), and states in her contributing chapter that the ceiling for BAME leaders "is not made of glass but of concrete" (p. 58). Chaudry (2019) explains that her own research has shown that BAME female leaders in secondary education in England face several barriers that are related to both their gender and ethnicity which she says "are hard to separate" (p. 62). I will take these insights into consideration when listening to the stories of female special school headteachers. Common barriers to success identified by Chaudry's (2019) research participants identify attitudes towards BAME teachers, caring and family responsibilities and being young (p.58). She further evidenced factors such as social and cultural issues, lack of professional networks, and workload. The most commonly cited were lack of self-confidence, availability of suitable posts, and attitudes of senior leaders displaying covert racism and sexism, (p. 59). A further critical view of Chaudry's (2019) research has demonstrated the lack of self-confidence in the research participants. This builds on the findings of Coleman (2007) when looking closely into gender inequalities. She compared headteachers' views on gender and leadership eight years apart and found that over this period very little had changed, in fact the findings revealed that women over this period of time took less time and opportunities to carefully plan their careers, especially for senior roles, compared to men. Chaudry (2019) is explicit when she states that her participants were reflective in their interviews and raised the issue of "lack of self-confidence" (p. 63) as limiting factors that they dealt with in their everyday working lives. Women's oppression therefore will be examined as part of the theoretical framework within this research.

A woman's place is in the home?

Many academics demonstrate the role that family life, responsibilities and commitments can play in affecting women's career advancement, (for example, Coleman, 2002; McNamara et al., 2010). Coleman (2002) found in her survey of male and female headteachers "the impact their career appeared to have had on their family life" (p. 50). The next chapter gives examples of literature relating to women, caring and the family.

Caring expectations

Following a quantitative survey of six thousand parents, a series of qualitative interviews and online discussion forums in the UK, The Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009) found that "the majority of modern parents no longer think about work and childcare in 'traditional' terms".

Despite reported changes in their thinking about gender roles within family, over three quarters of the mothers in the study reported taking primary responsibility for childcare (p. 11) and only 55 percent of fathers in the study reported taking "two week's statutory paternity leave when their last child was born" (p. 13). This research presents evidence that traditional gender ideologies and vehicles of socialisation in our society continue to dictate differentiated roles for men and women in the family.

The differences in roles depend on the expectation that women will take responsibility for unpaid care within the home, regardless of work commitments or personal preference, and that men will adopt the role of the breadwinner who works within a full-time, uninterrupted and hierarchical model of employment (McKie et al., 2001). Research related to gender and educational leadership state that, in addition to caring commitments within the home, women are also more liable than men to take responsibility for the day to day domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning (Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2009).

Fuller's research (2009) stated that men and women find that creating a balance between the personal and professional aspects of their lives was difficult, and that personal issues influenced their career aspirations. Lacey (2004) concluded that the extent to which women teachers would consider career progression was driven by a number of family related factors including: motherhood, the number and age of their children, the needs of their parents, and their spouse and the needs of their spouse's parents.

The evidence cited by Coleman (2001) shows that women are more likely than their male counterparts to have responsibilities for the care of dependent relatives. For example, Coleman (2001) found that among her

female headteacher respondents, 31.5% stated that they cared for elderly or other dependent relatives, and these responsibilities "were slightly more prevalent among the over 50s, whose parents might be more likely to need help" (p. 81). According to Chaudry (2019) these barriers faced by potential women leaders are still prevalent today. Chaudry's (2019) research shows that the embedded and negative attitudes towards women (Coleman, 2005) are still prevalent in some of our schools, even though these issues were initially identified decades ago. It appears that little progress has been made to support aspirant women leaders in education, despite changes to legislation, including the Equality Act 2010 which makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of gender and ethnicity. The continued oppression of women acts as a significant barrier in women's desired leadership journeys and further challenges their aspiration for promotion.

Teaching: 'A good job for a woman'

Teaching is traditionally thought of "as a woman's job" (Steadman, 1985). The hours, holidays and pay as well as the nurture and selflessness required of teachers reflect a profession that is perceived to be suitable for women wanting to combine work and motherhood (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Thornton & Bricheno, 2009).

Thornton and Bricheno (2009) argue that women often perceive teaching as a suitable career, however, they state, it is "rarely a first choice occupation for men in England" (p. 167). The authors suggest that men enter teaching following a negative experience in a different occupational sector or a form of academic failure. The workforce data in England show that men are outnumbered by women at classroom level (DfE, 2018), this evidence suggests that teaching is more 'feminised' as opposed to a 'masculinised" teaching profession. Some academics have questioned the notion that teaching is a feminised profession by illuminating the ways that some educational cultures and institutional practices make it difficult for women to balance motherhood and a career in teaching. Conley and Jenkins (2011) found that changes in the teaching profession since the 1988 Education Reform Act has led mothers in the teaching profession to rethink their

careers or "to reduce their hours or leave the profession either permanently or until their care responsibilities are lighter" (p. 500).

The authors argue that the modernisation agendas in England and Wales have created an "implicit motherhood bar" for women in the teaching profession and that it has become "increasingly difficult for them to combine work with starting a family and ensuring caring responsibilities" (p. 504).

Conley and Jenkins (2011) conclude that while the teaching profession is statistically dominated by women and therefore 'feminised' on paper, the environment in which teachers work "is becoming increasingly masculinised with a long hours working culture that leaves little space for combining work and family responsibilities" (p. 504). The evidence suggests the notion that teaching is a "woman's job" and therefore compatible with caring responsibilities in the home may be becoming a thing of the past.

The conflict between family commitments and career

Some studies evaluate the role that motherhood and family commitments play in constraining women teachers' career advancement (for example, Coleman, 2002; Moreau et al., 2007; McNamara et al., 2010). This research does not suggest that family life is an inconsequential element of male lived experience and that women's careers are different from men's because they are aligned with and sometimes a consequence of women's caring roles within the home (Conley & Jenkins, 2011, p. 492).

Interviews conducted by Moreau and colleagues (2007) suggested that "career breaks after childbirth and /or returning part time" are key factors in women's under-representation in educational leadership positions (p. 242).

The workforce data in England show there are significantly more women teachers working part-time in secondary schools than male teachers (DfE, 2018). This is further echoed in the UK labour market as a whole in which 41% of women and 12% of men were employed on a part-time basis between August and October 2014 (McGuiness & Watson, 2015, p. 5).

The analysis of results regarding a large scale survey of NASUWT union members holding senior posts and schools that have recently appointed senior leaders, McNamara and colleagues (2010) found that female respondents rated caring and family responsibilities to be the second greatest barrier to leadership aspirations for women (p.14). They reported that "after returning from maternity breaks, nearly 30% returned part-time and 10% to supply posts" (p.13). Researchers found teachers in part-time roles are less interested in promotion than their full-time colleagues (Wilson et al., 2006, p. 245). This suggests that child-rearing and the necessity to work part-time that some teachers experience can have a negative effect on their leadership aspirations.

Researchers such as Evetts (1994); Thornton and Bricheno (2009); McLay (2008), comment that as a result of maternity leave and part-time working following child birth, women are in the main older than their male counterparts when applying for headship. In her study of the career pathways of men and women headteachers in UK independent co-educational schools, McLay (2008) found that career breaks to have children disadvantage women by giving them a "shorter window of opportunity" in which to apply for headship (p. 359). Her work suggests that, challenges that are presented by career breaks and part-time working are heightened by age. The feminist notion of one 'personal is political' stance highlights the importance of the need for political action and effectiveness (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 68), exemplified by the government campaign to increase flexible working supported by 'The Flexible Working in the UK', a partnership of government departments, business groups, trade unions and charities (Report June 2019).

Overall, the evidence demonstrated in this section suggests that having a child has the potential to constrain women's career trajectories and choices in many ways. The research suggests that, as Shakeshaft (2006) observes, "many women make career decisions around their family, while many men make family decisions around issues of career" (p. 508).

Work – family arrangements

In view of the constraints and challenges investigated in the previous section, McLay (2008) argues that women teachers are more likely than men to have to implement a 'life' strategy, "that is the conscious decision of whether to have children with the resulting responsibilities for childcare" (p. 363). Evetts' (1994) career history interviews with twenty male and female secondary headteachers in the Midlands of England unfolded five career strategies for managing career and family life. These can be found in Figure 3.

Figure 3: *Evetts' career strategies*

Single Career
The one–person career strategy which involves one person only.
The two–person career strategy in which one partner advances their career while the other does not pursue advancement.
Dual Career
The postponement strategy in which one partner postpones their career development until the other has attained promotion.
The modification strategy in which one partner adjusts their career to fit in with the career plans and advancements of the other partner.
The balancing strategy in which both partners pursue career advancement simultaneously.

Source: Evetts, 1994, p. 53.

This typology of career strategies was extended on in Coleman's major study of six hundred and seventy men and women secondary headteachers in 2002. The author found evidence of each of Evetts' career types in her data. She also found evidence to suggest that the age of female headteachers has an influence over the type of career model and strategy they adopt to balance work and family responsibilities. This is an element missing from Evetts' typology, and was used by Coleman to portray three career models that women headteachers with children deploy. The three models outlined within Coleman's work are traditional/subjective, mixed mode and changing balance. These can be found in Table 1.

Evetts (2000, p.63) did argue in her later research that some women were achieving high positions by remaining single and childfree. Whilst others were developing highly complex caring arrangements.

Table 1: *Three female career models*

	Traditional/ Subjective	Mixed Mode	Changing
Who?	Wives of headteachers	Older women headteachers	Younger women headteachers and their partners
Children?	Yes	Yes	Less than half with children
Career break?	Yes	Yes	Minimal maternity leave
Main childcare responsibility?	Wife	Woman has responsibility, uses childminder	More likely to share responsibility
Main career strategy?	Single or subjective career or accommodated career	Postponed, moderated or balanced	'Male' model or balanced
Domestic responsibility	Mainly with wives	More often with women, some sharing	More evidence of sharing
Moving to follow husband	Yes, common	Yes, fairly common	Almost equal with husband

Source: Coleman, 2007, p. 77

Coleman (2007) argues that younger women headteachers are more likely to adopt a 'male' model of career than their older colleagues. According to Coleman this is a career strategy in which "work takes precedence" over family life (p. 74). It is those who opt for a 'male' career strategy that are more likely to be childfree (p. 74).

In a series of in-depth interviews with female academic managers working in a UK university, Priola (2007) found that the majority of the women she interviewed did not have children and that they believed "they could not do their job while having a family" (p. 33). Priola's interviewees appeared to perceive educational leadership and motherhood to be incompatible. They had therefore prioritised their careers (p. 34).

Coleman's (2007) female career models found in Table 1 suggest that older women headteachers are likely to take on the bulk of childcare responsibility, while younger female senior leaders will adopt a 'changing' model of career in which they are likely to share childcare responsibility with their partner. This typology fails to account for the households in which the father is the primary caregiver. Kramer et al., (2013) observe that stay-at-home father households "are the least studied form of household income structure" (p. 652). This is despite this type of family arrangement "increasing in prevalence and visibility" (Dunn et al., 2013, p. 3). Increasing numbers of stay-at-home father households may mark a subtle shift in family arrangements from 2002, the year in which Coleman's study was published, to present day.

It is interesting to note that in Coleman's study of four hundred and sixty-nine female headteachers in England in 2001 only three respondents listed "house husband" in the list of occupations of partners" (p. 79). Via an online survey, Dunn and colleagues (2013) found the decision-making process around family arrangements, care-giving and paid work to be complex.

The authors' analysis showed that economic reasons were the primary determinant of work–family arrangements. This finding is in keeping with exchange theory which indicates that fathers are more likely to be primary caregivers when their partners have greater earning potential and career prospects (Kramer et al., 2013, p. 665).

Failing to address women's career development according to Cook (2006) can lead to disequilibrium, a lack of equilibrium or career stability. According to Cook (2006) teachers can experience their disequilibrium as either productive or unproductive. She argues the mitigating factor is their ability to modify their existing schema to make room for new ideas and experiences. Cook's research findings identified emerging themes, one being "resiliency and resolve" which enabled some of the women in her sample to renegotiate their relationship with the world, (Cook, 2006).

Stereotyping, essentialism and bias

Having discussed the constraints that family responsibility can pose to women aspirants, the next section of this chapter addresses the issues of stereotyping, essentialism and bias in the workplace.

As Coleman, (2007) explains "stereotypes cause barriers to career progress and centre around the unthinking belief that there is a 'natural order' – male leadership and female subordination" (p. 79). It is therefore to literature concerned with stereotyping, essentialising and bias that this chapter now turns.

Male stereotypes

I have presented evidence to suggest that women face many challenges and structural constraints throughout their careers, and these can influence individual women's career advancement and professional aspirations.

Women continue to be influenced by historical ideologies as leadership and the public exercise of power is traditionally and stereotypically associated with men (Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Ford, 2006; Thornton & Bricheno, 2009; Coleman, 2003). Schein (2007) argues that the "think male – think manager attitude" endures within our 21st century society, and that there is a deeply held societal belief that leadership positions are "for men only", or "only men are really qualified" to fulfil them (p. 12).

The 'masculine' stereotype of the educational leader is typically aligned with what gender theorists call 'hegemonic masculinity' i.e. the image of the middle class, white, heterosexual male (Chard, 2013, p. 171). Connell (1995) states "hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 77). Within this definition, 'hegemonic masculinity' can be seen as "a pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity)" performed with the intention of preserving the dominance of a socially powerful group of men (Connell &

Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). It is this stereotype of 'hegemonic masculinity', Coleman (2007) argues, that "consciously and unconsciously influences our expectations of what a leader should be", and therefore shapes both what we expect from a leader and the behaviours of those who occupy educational leadership positions (p. 383).

While considering the stereotypical alignment between hegemonic masculinity and the educational leader, it is interesting to question the extent to which deputy headship is generally associated with masculinity. Academics suggest that within the secondary school context it is the headteacher who is the leader whereas those holding deputy headteacher posts have more of a managerial function (Harris et al., 2003, p. 2).

In recent literature concerned with the gendered perceptions of those holding deputy headteacher posts, it seems interesting to consider how these senior yet more managerial roles are perceived and whether they are traditionally and stereotypically associated with masculinity as well. Guihen's (2017) recent study of the career experiences of aspirants of women deputy headteachers explore the research carried out by NAHT (2016: 3). She cited that respondents were asked what would encourage them to pursue headship, her findings from the NAHT study showed that over half of the respondents said they would like to be free from inspection in their first year (p. 102).

Guihen's (2017) study suggests reasons why both men and women deputy headteachers may reject headship. School workforce data in England (2018), however, does identify that women hold fewer secondary headships than deputy headships. Guihen (2017) gives some insight into the structural and cultural obstacles that hinder their career advancement. She states that in November 2015, thirty-eight percent of headteachers in state-funded secondary schools were female. For the same period, forty-seven percent of deputy headteachers in state-funded secondary schools were female (DfE, 2016).

Headteacher recruitment and reproducing the status quo

Guihen (2017) uses the work of Coleman (2002, p. 47) "to identify five types of discrimination that women experience during the headteacher recruitment process" (p.114).

* Overt discrimination: "legal discrimination prior to the legislation of the 1970s"

* Direct discrimination: "when someone is treated less favourably than others"

* Sexual harassment: unwelcome sexual behaviour such as being "groped by an interviewer over lunch"

* Indirect discrimination: "when a non-essential requirement for a job has the effect of excluding one gender or ethnic group"

* Prevailing social values: "the ongoing and unquestioned values of our society"

(Coleman, 2002, pp. 39-47).

Coleman's (2002) typology echoes the types of discrimination reported by other academics concerned with the under-representation of women in secondary headship and states for example, "a number of studies have considered the effects that stereotypical attitudes towards women by selection and interview panels can have on their advancement towards secondary headship" (Shakeshaft, 2006). Guihen (2017) explains that in a survey of men and women secondary headteachers in Birmingham (UK) Fuller (2009) found that "64.7 per cent of women were aware of sexist attitudes in connection with job applications or promotions compared to 21.9 per cent of men" (p. 27). Guihen (2017) used Sperandio and Kagoda's (2010) study in her work showing that "some women feared sexist discrimination when applying for headship posts due to the male dominated nature of interview panels. The predominance of men involved in

headteacher recruitment is a common theme within the literature" (p. 56), (for example, Kagoda, 2015; Coleman, 2002) and suggests, as Moorosi (2010) observes, "that this has the potential to 'sabotage' women" as their "suitability and acceptability are likely to be assessed according to male attributes" (p. 549). More recently recruitment panels are more balanced with safer recruitment policies and procedures, policies encourage a balance of male and female interviewers.

In an educational climate of managerialism and accountability Gronn and Lacey, (2010) say that schools tend to "play safe" in the recruitment of leaders. The authors used data from two studies and stated the largest "blocker to career aspirations was school based appointments and selection" (p. 286).

Recently the Equality Act (2017) aims to improve equal job opportunities and fairness for employees, organisations are directed through the Equality Act (2017) to have policies in place to support the legislation. The protected characteristics include gender.

Women's responsibilities and self-perceptions

Women have a vast amount of work and responsibility in the family home and in addition the burden of stereotypical attitudes. Studies have found that women are less likely to plan their career which lead to headship (Coleman, 2007; Wilson et al., 2006). This could demonstrate that some women find it difficult to face the possibility of failure or have a lack of confidence in their own abilities.

Interestingly, other academics have reported that women apply for promotion if they fulfill the majority of the job specification, (Coleman, 2002, p. 30). This exposes that women are less likely to take risks or speculate when applying for promoted positions. Lastly, some research has found that women are more likely to be promoted in the same school or local authority than men (McNamara et al., 2010, p. 29). It is reasonable to think that this finding demonstrates a lack of confidence to go beyond the comfort zone of familiarity. In reality, 43% of women surveyed by Coleman (2002)

"harboured doubts about their ability to obtain headship" (p. 32).

Lacey (2004) states that some women aspirants to headship find the school leadership selection process to be "traumatic because of an inherent fear of rejection, fear of the unknown and a lack of confidence" (p. 9). She gives evidence to suggest that older women are more likely than younger women to "view the application process as a judgement of them personally" (p. 9). Comparable vulnerabilities and uncertainties can be found in the diary entries of twenty-one headship aspirants that were collected by Gronn and Lacey (2004). Empirical evidence suggests that lack of confidence may be exacerbated by line managers who feel unable to boost confidence levels. Rhodes and Brundrett, (2005), for example, examined the perceptions of twelve primary headteachers and twelve middle leaders in the Midlands of England. They found that while "many of the heads were aware of the need to build staff confidence, they were not sure how this could be done effectively and equitably with a view to increase possibilities for succession" (p. 17).

The perceptions that we have of ourselves have been shown to influence the levels of confidence that we experience. Clance and Imes (1978) suggest that some women experience 'the imposter phenomenon' or "an internal experience of intellectual phoniness" (p. 241). Following psychotherapy sessions with one hundred and fifty successful women, the authors found that their respondents "did not experience an internal sense of success" (p. 241) and reported a "generalised anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration related to inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement" (p. 242). The women believed that others held an inflated impression of their abilities, and they therefore lived in fear that they would eventually be exposed as both ineffectual and deceitful (Jarrett, 2010, p. 380).

The women in Clance and Imes' (1978) original sample were found to be more likely than their male counterparts to attribute their success to external factors, luck or effort as opposed to their own intelligence and abilities (p. 242). Guihen (2017) states, "the importance of women's self-perceptions can

also be highlighted by Smith (2011a)" (p. 134). She reported that taking a life history approach to research, Smith was able to conduct open-ended interviews with forty female secondary school teachers. She invited newly qualified, mid and late-career teachers as well as headteachers in southern and central England to speak about the factors framing their decisions about their professional futures (p. 10). Taking an inductive approach to analysis inspired by grounded theory, a typology of female teachers' career approaches focusing on how women's "career decisions are linked with self-perceptions about personal agency" was posited (p. 22). One group perceived their career paths as being externally defined, while the other group perceived their careers to be self-defined. According to Guihen (2017) she concludes that "women's self-perceptions regarding their own agency, and the ways in which they choose to exert it, are key influences in career decision-making" (p. 22).

Having explored the constraints, self-perceptions and women's perceived lack of ability in their own confidence that can affect women's confidence when aspiring to special school headship. This thesis will use the analysis of special school headteacher stories and reflections to examine the emergent themes within the feminist theoretical framework regarding women's oppression and feminist consciousness.

The next part of this chapter addresses the educational landscape in England and the ways in which the special school headteacher role can be viewed.

Level 2: School specific influences

The educational landscape and impressions of the 'top job'

Perceptions of the educational climate in England and beliefs about the secondary headteacher role are believed to be deterring some potential aspirants from aspiring towards and applying for secondary headship (NCSL, 2007). Bush (2015) highlights that in the light of evidence relating to both factors "it is perhaps unsurprising that headship is unattractive" (p. 855).

School Improvement perspectives

Effective leadership is widely accepted as being a key constitute in achieving school improvement (Ofsted, 2000).

Harris and Chapman (2002) discuss the aims of a small-scale research project that contributed to the knowledge base concerning effective leadership, with an emphasis on schools facing challenging circumstances. The study findings suggest that the demands that schools facing challenging circumstances place upon leaders, requires them to have a broad range of leadership approaches underpinned by a core set of values and strong moral purpose. Interestingly, the findings highlight the notion that effective leadership is defined and driven by individual value systems, rather than instrumental managerial concerns (p. 11).

Bush (1998) links leadership to values or purpose while management relates to implementation or technical issues. He argued for a redefinition of educational management, and has stated that he regrets that "the discipline stands accused of 'managerialism', a stress on procedures at the expense of educational purposes and values" (p. 34).

Leadership and management lack of change in education

Rhodes and Brundrett (2005) note that the word 'succession' is absent from the majority of books "concerned with leadership and management in schools" (p. 4). They emphasise the lack of succession planning, knowledge and understanding of how schools can improve can have "potentially profound implications for individuals" (p.6). They argue the succession planning for new senior and middle leaders is significant and may support school improvement efforts and "herald" a new direction for the school (p. 7).

Coleman (2007) studied a comparison of school leadership over a ten year period, she researched using surveys and gathered the views of men and women leaders and headteachers in secondary schools in England from the 1990s until 2004. Her findings demonstrated prejudice from governors and the wider community regarding women in headteacher roles. The results

further showed that women headteachers were more likely to have partners and children and finally women still feel they have to prove their worth as a leader. In Coleman's (2010) empirical research the findings had even more interesting nuances. She found a decline in women's networks and the reasons for the decline is an aging profile, by the lack of interest in younger women potential aspirant leaders. Furthermore, a lack of support from Universities and Local Authorities was clearly evident.

With this observation in mind, it is to literature concerned with performativity in the English school system as well as women's perceptions of the headteacher role that this chapter now turns. It should be noted there is no literature relating specifically to female special school headteachers.

Transformational and charismatic leadership

A substantial part of leadership research has focused on the individual charismatic leader (Bass & Stogill, 1990), a leadership perspective focusing the leader gifted and heroic traits (Yukl, 1999; Gronn, 2003b; Spillane, 2006) that is often connected to instructional and transformational models of leadership (Hallinger, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). A transformational leadership perspective is orientated towards how charismatic leaders exercise influence over their colleagues (Leithwood & Louis, 2012) through the ability to engage and encourage staff to transform the school (Robinson, 2008). By being able to inspire teachers to improve their work through building relations, such transformational leaders develop the organisation's capacity to reach common and ambitious goals (Robinson et al., 2008).

Level 3: Systemic changes and educational policy

The educational landscape

Teachers and leaders do not work in a cultural and social vacuum; their behaviours, perceptions and professional aspirations are shaped by the education system in which they work. Ball (2013) argues that observers of the education system in England have witnessed "the increasing colonisation

of educational policy by economic policy imperatives" (p. 46). The move towards the principles of neo-liberalism and its associated doctrines of efficiency, competition and marketisation has resulted in a stream of reforms in educational policy (Earley, 2013). Ball (2013) explores what he terms 'policy technologies' (p. 48). These are mechanisms of educational reform and involve "the calculated deployment of techniques and artefacts to organise human forces and capabilities into functioning networks of power" (Ball, 2003, p. 216).

Ball (2003) classifies the market, managerialism and performativity as "policy technologies" (see Figure 4). Policies are argued to be interlinked and working together to bring public sector organisations in line "with the methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector" (Ball, 2003, p. 216). These mechanisms of reform are argued to be changing or re-shaping the practices, social relationships and identities of individual teachers and leaders (Ball, 2013, p. 49). All three technologies are said to create an educational climate that leaves little or no space for "an autonomous or collective ethical self" (Ball, 2003, p. 226). It is anticipated that these mechanisms of reform have the capacity to bring light to the relationship between the lived experiences of the individual special school headteacher and the educational culture in which they are situated.

Figure 4: *Ball's policy technologies*

- The market
- Managerialism
- Performativity
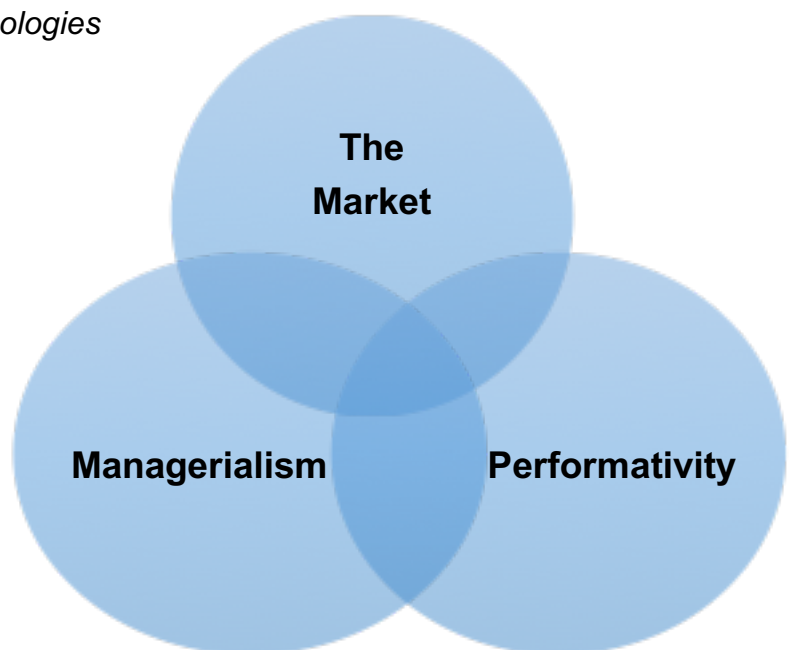
The market

Marketisation hinges on the concepts of choice, competition and diversity. The Education Reform Act (1988) drew closely on neo-liberal thought to advocate the creation of 'quasi-markets' and entrepreneurialism in education (Higham & Earley, 2013). Neo-liberalism, according to Ball (2012), "is one of those terms that is used so widely and so loosely that it is in danger of becoming meaningless" (p. 3). It is used here to refer to the "set of practices that are organised around a certain imagination of the 'market'" (Shamir, 2008 cited in Ball, 2012, p. 3). The increase of neo-liberal thinking in education encouraged moves to increase parental choice and school diversity.

Whitty, (2008) observes that the Conservative government of the 1980s and 1990s "acted to increase the power of the 'consumer' and reduce that of the 'producers'" (p. 166). This was achieved via 'open enrolment', by linking a school's funding to the number of students on roll as well as the introduction of City Technology Colleges and Grant Maintained Schools (Stevenson & Wood, 2013, p. 48). It was thought that greater parental choice as well as an increased choice of schools to choose from would mean that high-achieving schools would be popular parental choices and hence thrive within the educational 'marketplace'. "Underperforming schools, would be forced to improve to attract consumers and avoid closure". Market forces in education and therefore the diversity of educational provision available for parental 'consumers' has intensified since The Education Reform Act (Stevenson & Wood, 2013). For example, the introduction and growing presence of academy schools (defined as "publicly-funded independent schools" (Academies Commission, 2013, p. 16)) and free schools (defined as schools that are "funded by the government but aren't run by the local council" (DfE, 2016a)) in England increased parental choice further.

Managerialism

Ball (2013) states that New Public Management (NPM) has been instrumental in reforming public sector organisations (p. 55). Guihen (2017) argues that by "drawing heavily on the thinking underpinning the private

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sector, this is a form of management which is driven by an emphasis on target-setting, performance review" (p.89), "The use of incentives and sanctions to reward appropriate behaviours and punish inappropriate behaviour or what is deemed poor performance" (Stevenson & Wood, 2013, p. 50). In essence, managerialism is concerned with quality, performance and control. According to Ball (2013), the manager or leader "is the cultural hero of the new public service paradigm" (p. 55). He or she is instrumental in creating an organisational culture in which workers feel both accountable and committed *(*p. 55). Conley and Jenkins (2011) note that managerialism places schools and individual teachers under considerable pressure to perform and increase attainment (p. 495). Like marketisation, the policy technology of managerialism has the capacity to shape teachers' professional experiences. The data collected as part of this study has the potential to grow the ways in which individual special school headteachers have responded to, and possibly enacted, this style of management.

Performativity

Ball (2013) defines performativity as "a culture or a system of 'terror'. It is a regime of 'accountability' that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change". Ball's (2013) notion of 'performativity' is interlaced with the work of Lyotard (1984) who defined the term as the "optimisation of the global relationship between input and output" (p. 11). In its concern for efficiency, outcomes and continual improvement, a 'performative' culture requires individuals and their practice to be quantifiable and "accountable against the same standards" (Perryman, 2009, p. 618). Ball (2010) cites that a performative educational culture "invites and incites us to make ourselves more effective" as teachers and leaders (p. 125). As well as being concerned with efficiency, a performative culture is performance-oriented. It offers both symbolic and tangible rewards and sanctions depending on individual activity and appearance (Ball, 2003, p. 216).

Disengagement in leadership is argued by Gronn and Rawings-Sanaei (2003) the authors state that individuals decline leadership opportunities

when working within a policy environment that fosters role growth, work intensity and increased responsibilities. Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei (2003) highlight these notions as "leadership disengagement" and state that a performative educational culture can deter potential aspirants from headship.

Forrester's (2005) research paper of *All in a day's work: Primary teachers 'Performing and Caring'*, findings suggest that many teachers were working in a "low trust, tightly managed framework of constraints". Forrester, (2005) highlights the "conflict" of caring in the primary phase and the effect on teaching and learning. Evidence cited in the study, further demonstrates the effect on succession planning in leadership and teachers becoming stuck in the burden of performance and bureaucracy (p. 285).

The school inspection framework is another possible argument that prevents potential headship applicants. Interestingly, MacBeath and colleagues (2009) found that more than half of the Scottish headteachers they interviewed described their experiences of inspection as 'adversarial', 'undermining' or 'stigmatising' (p. 33).

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that current inspection arrangements may be deterring deputies from applying for headships. In a survey of deputy and assistant headteachers and vice principals conducted by The National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) in 2016 found that only 36 per cent of participants aspired towards headship (p. 6). When participants were asked what would make them feel more confident about pursuing 'the top job', 58 per cent of deputies and vice principals said "no inspection in their first year" (p. 16). The authors said that England's "punitive accountability framework may be the key factor deterring deputies from headship. This needs to be addressed by Ofsted and employers if we are to encourage high performing professionals into headship" (p. 3). The findings are not gender or school phase specific, and suggest a potential reason why some male as well as female deputy headteachers dismiss the idea of headship. What the findings of these studies do not account for is why women are less likely to become headteachers. This study aims to shed some light on this issue within the analysis stage of the thesis. My intention is to focus on the stories of the

female headteachers and the interpretation of meaning within the diverges and convergences of the stories.

Level 4: Generic aspects of special school headship, opportunities and disincentives

Perceptions of the headteacher role

The literature has highlighted a performative education culture that is deemed to be stressful and requires long working hours and high levels of accountability and performativity, leading to vast amounts of bureaucracy (Barty et al., 2005; Gronn, 2003; Bush, 2015; Earley, 2013). Guihen (2017) cited in her research the findings reported by Smith (2011b). "In her life history study of 40 female secondary school teachers, Smith found that 28 of the 30 participants who were not headteachers at the time of interview perceived headship negatively and therefore did not aspire towards headship" *(p. 517)*. Her participants perceived the headteacher role to be "incompatible with their pupil-centred values, working preferences and personal lives" (p. 526).

Special school headship requires individuals to move away from the relatively private domain of the classroom to the wider, more public sphere of school leadership. The media representations can have a negative influence on the headteacher 'pipeline', the authors suggest that it is important to "focus not only on the reasons why the job is unattractive, but also on the complex reasons why it is worth doing" *(p. 128)*. This is further argued by MacBeath and colleagues (2009) who state that by accurately "modelling" the headteacher role and emphasising the idea that many headteachers spend "a greater amount of time than is perceived by teachers on activities that teachers appear to value" more positive impressions of headship may be formed (p. 56).

Enabling influences

The literature concerned with educational leadership tells us much more about the disincentives of headship than the incentives of applying for the

role (MacBeath, 2009, p. 409). The literature points to some aspects which are likely to motivate women to pursue secondary headship, there is no literature relating to career development of special headship. These include networking, mentors and role models (see, for example, Coleman, 2010; Young & McLeod, 2001), values and a sense of vocation (see, for example, Fuller, 2012; NCSL, 2006) and leadership development programmes and opportunities (for example, Crawford & Earley, 2011; Draper & McMichael, 2003b). It is to the first of these, networking, mentors and role models, which this chapter turns.

Networks

Informal networks are cited by Shakeshaft (2006) observing that women are less likely to focus on informal networks to advance their careers (p. 502). It could be argued that professional networks are possibly relied upon more by men e.g. "old boys" networks or clubs (Coleman, 2010). The lack of network opportunities for women is interesting and links to the challenges and constraints faced by women aspirant special school headteachers. The research demonstrates that formal and informal networks are a lever to those chasing career advancement. Coleman (2010, pp. 772–779), argues that women–only networks can be beneficial in the following ways:

- To boost and have confidence in own abilities.
- To make advantageous connections with other professionals.
- To offer training and leadership development opportunities.
- To offer role models to younger women.
- To provide a safe space in which to articulate one's views.

However, evidence to suggest that despite the advantages above, women-only networks in education are rare. Drawing on two case studies, Coleman (2010) found that women–only networks were less likely to be in operation in education than in more male dominated occupations (p. 773). Furthermore, Guihen (2017) states that Perriton (2006) reports an interest in such networks is dwindling as younger women "show a degree of ambivalence (at best) and hostility (at worst) to women's networks" (p. 101). "The author

argues that this is a result of a willingness to avoid the sort of comments already directed at women seen in same-sex conversations in the workplace – the references to 'mother's meetings' or 'Women's Institute gatherings'" as well as "the implied narrative of victimhood" some women believe lurks beneath such initiatives" *(p. 101).*

In Coleman's (2011) view, younger women's reactions against enterprises such as women-only networks may be a result of "a backlash against feminism, with younger women in particular feeling that their fate is in their own hands" (p. 155). According to Guihen (2017) "This supposed 'backlash', has been commented on by others in the field" (p. 89). Hall (1996), for instance, reports a 'fear of feminism' in her study of female heads. She reports that her participants believed that the term 'feminist' was an 'explicit social label' with the potential to align an individual with 'unwelcome stereotypes' (p. 193). Banyard (2010) argues that this 'feminist backlash' may be because many women today "believe that feminism has achieved its aims and that the struggle for equality between women and men is over" (p. 1). She suggests therefore that many women believe that feminism is no longer needed in a society in which women's equality is protected in law. According to McRobbie (2009), we now live in a society defined by a neo-liberalist discourse in which freedom, equality and empowerment for women are constructed as consumerism and the right to choose; feminism, she argues, has been made to seem 'aged' and 'redundant'. It has been "cast into the shadows" *(p. 11).* Recently, Peacock (2019) one of the founders of WomenEd has established a network of women in education locally, regionally and nationally and has championed networking groups. Women have responded positively and feedback suggests that women who participate in the WomenEd movement have found new synergy, (Porritt, 2019, p. 3). Gregory (2020) endorses the evidence in her recent review of WomenEd. I will now move on to explore the part that role models can play in encouraging women to pursue leadership positions.

Role models

Younger women special school headteachers are under-represented
meaning there are few role models for younger women teachers, however,
according to the DfE, (2018) School Work Force in England statistics show
women in special school headship are sustaining their headships positions
from the age of forty-five years upwards (see appendix 2). There is evidence
within the statistics that special school middle leaders and senior leaders in
special schools are staying in their current positions, (DfE, 2018) the results
show an unevenness of women developing towards headship. According to
Singh and colleagues, (2006) young women are "disadvantaged by the lack
of female role models at the top organisations" (p. 69).

Mentors

Researchers are interested in positive mentoring and Shakeshaft (2006)
observes the lack of mentors for women, stating that women are less likely
than men to have mentors who "help them negotiate careers" (p. 502). Some
researchers have demonstrated the strengths in informal and formal
mentoring to support women's leadership aspirations.

Coleman's (2011) research regarding mentoring has shown positive
elements showing her study of sixty women leaders to report that mentoring
had helped them to build successful careers. Mentoring benefits were further
highlighted by McLay (2008) in her study of male and female headteachers
in co-educational independent schools. She found that "all of the women had
been in receipt of mentoring felt it had been useful" (p. 368). It appears when
mentoring is in place for existing and potential headteachers, as MacBeath
(2009) observes, "the task of leading a school becomes less daunting to the
incumbent and more appealing to the career deputy" (p. 415).

Positive mentoring for women is dependent upon strong role models that are
willing to empower others and make a difference to the careers of women.

Jones (2016) highlights some women leaders that are unwilling to help
younger women, Jones refers to "queen bees" (p. 89). According to Guihen

(2017) she explains that by "drawing on narrative data with women managers in the UK housing sector and higher education", Mavin (2006) found that although senior women acknowledge the challenges and constraints facing women leaders, "they do not feel comfortable taking responsibility for the women in management mantle" (p. 360). Highlighting incidences of 'female misogyny' in her data as well as the important influence of gendered contexts, she raises important questions about the usefulness and implications of the 'queen bee' label, the belief that women are 'natural allies' and "the notion of solidarity behaviour as an advancement strategy for women in management" *(p. 361).*

Mentoring is however reliant on those higher up the occupational hierarchy taking the time to mentor younger members of staff. There is a suggestion in the research literature that some women leaders may be unwilling to help more junior women seek career advancement and can, therefore, be thought of as 'queen bees' (Jones, 2016).

Recently the Best Practice Network (2019) has created coaching and mentoring opportunities for women leaders from middle to senior leadership when participating in the National Professional Qualifications. Case studies have been used as research from the past three years, (Gandy, 2019).

This section of this chapter has explored female relationships at work, and the ways in which networks, role models and mentors can inspire women to pursue special school headship. The following section will discuss the enabling influence of women's personal values and their desire to make a difference.

Values and social justice

Recent research shows that training to be a teacher is related to the trainee's beliefs about the importance of education in our society, as well as having a moral imperative for wanting to make a difference to the lives of young people. Similar motivations have also been cited as inspiring women to aspire towards and apply for headship. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) observe that many of the women in the literature on gender and educational

leadership cite "a strong desire to transform the learning conditions and opportunities for those who have been least well served by current educational policies and practices" as their reason for entering and establishing a career in educational leadership (p. 11). There are many research findings that support this observation. For example, in their mixed methods study of primary school teachers' careers in England, Thornton and Bricheno (2000) found men to be "more interested in obtaining influence/power/status within their teaching careers, while, in contrast, women appear more frequently to seek promotion in order to use it to make a difference" (p. 200). (Appendix 7 Pilot project - reflective account).

Research focusing on existing headteachers highlights the capacity that they have to act altruistically and in the pursuit of social justice i.e. "that everyone is equal, no matter what their gender, ethnicity, religion and so on" (Coleman, 2012, p. 597). In her study of 18 secondary headteachers in the Midlands of England, Fuller (2012) found "some headteachers are engaged in educational leadership that has at its core emancipatory intent" (p. 673). Fuller's work suggests the possibility of working for and towards social justice and espousing person-centred values as a headteacher despite the managerialist educational culture in which they work. Similarly, Smith (2011b) found that the existing headteachers in her study perceived headship as an "opportunity to enact the ethic of care and their pupil-centred values to maximum effect" (p. 530).

In a National College for School Leadership (NCSL, 2006) publication entitled *'Go for it: Reasons to be a Headteacher'*, the authors claim that the most commonly cited factor motivating existing headteachers "is the capacity to help children and young people to reach their potential" (p. 6). Alongside improving the life chances of individuals, the publication also indicates that heads are motivated by effecting positive change in the communities in which their schools are situated *(*p. 11). There is however no information provided in this publication about the research on which these claims are based.

Leithwood and colleagues (2004) maintain that school leadership "is second

only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 3). The authors therefore hint at the capacity that educational leadership has to positively influence students' learning and ultimately their life chances. In a NCSL publication concerned with leading schools in challenging circumstances, Flintham (2006) reports on interviews with eight headteachers leading primary, middle and secondary schools in areas of deprivation. He found the headteachers to be motivated by the challenge of helping the most vulnerable in our society and "by the drive to make a difference to both their schools and their communities" *(*p. 6). This energy is reported to be the result of the headteachers' core values and egalitarian beliefs.

Leadership development programmes and opportunities

McNamara (2010) researched gendered patterns in teachers' career progression. McNamara and colleagues (2010) found that their respondents perceived qualifications and leadership experience "as by far the most important enabler for leadership aspirations" (p. 14). Furthermore, Lee et al., (2009) explain that the odds of a deputy headteacher aspiring to headship "increased by three times if he/she had more development opportunities" such as attending professional development courses and programmes (p. 200). The authors explain however that the relationship between headteacher aspirations and professional development opportunities requires more attention from policy makers and those working with potential aspirants. Similarly, Coleman (2012) remarks that while leadership courses are beneficial, "there is a case for training aimed specifically at particular groups of 'outsiders' for example courses aimed at helping women aspire to leadership" (p. 602).

The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) is a leadership development programme designed for senior leaders in England and Wales who are "highly motivated to be a headteacher" and are "12 to 18 months from applying for headship posts" (Gov.UK, 2015). The programme was put into place in 1997 and has since then been revised several times (Crawford & Earley, 2011, p. 105). Rhodes and colleagues (2009) describe the NPQH

as a "rite of passage to headship" (p. 464) yet found that the NPQH is "unable to mend broken journeys and overcome concerns about headship that were already deeply planted" (p. 465). Interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that not all NPQH candidates aspire towards headship. A survey conducted by Earley and colleagues (2002) found that only 63% of NPQH candidates definitely wanted to become headteachers (p. 24). This suggests that over one third of those in the process of completing a programme designed for aspirant headteachers had reservations about the role and/or their capacity to lead a school. According to the National College of School Leadership, more women than men have completed the NPQH since 2010 (DfE, 2015b). The ongoing under-representation of women in headship may suggest that some women who complete the NPQH are choosing not to pursue headship. While some research has been carried out on the NPQH and its low conversion rate to headship (Rhodes et al., 2009), there appears to be little consideration in the literature about the gendered nature of this phenomenon.

Like the NPQH, Future Leaders is a leadership development programme designed for "current or aspiring senior leaders with the potential to reach headship within three years" (Future Leaders, 2015b). According to Earley and colleagues (2009), Future Leaders was introduced "due to the shortage of teachers taking on senior roles within schools, which is particularly acute in urban areas. It also aims to create a cadre of school leaders who commit their future careers to working in urban complex schools" (p. 296). It is notable that, drawing on data collected as part of an evaluation of the programme, the authors found that participants perceive themselves to be part of a 'movement' (p. 305) with "a strong commitment to social justice and equity and providing opportunities for disadvantaged children" (p. 299). Table 2 outlines data obtained from Future Leaders concerning the numbers of secondary participants on the programme as well as those that have gone on to become headteachers.

Table 2: *Future Leaders' participants and headteachers*

Number of Future Leaders' Secondary Participants (2006 – 2014)	
Male	245
Female	266
Prefer not to say	1
Number of Headteachers after the Future Leaders' Programme (2006 – 2014)	
Male	66
Female	42
Prefer not to say	0

Source: Future Leaders, 2015a

The evidence shows that, like the NPQH, more women than men have taken part in this leadership development programme, yet more men than women became headteachers following its completion. This data therefore echoes traditional gender dynamics in educational leadership, despite the supposed innovative nature of the programme.

It is noted that more recent active women movement groups such as WomenEd and regional women's leadership groups have supported the development of the women-only NPQH programmes, the impact is too early to measure, however, there is evidence of an increase in women registering for the courses. The authors also found that part–time leadership experience "appears to greatly help male teachers, especially at the secondary level, to obtain full-time administrative positions, and the same might be true for women if more women had these opportunities" (p. 61). Likewise, in their study of deputy headteachers who had been given the opportunity to take on an acting headteacher post, Draper and McMichael (2003b) found that many respondents felt that 'acting up' had "offered a chance to familiarise themselves with headship and to take on new responsibilities" (p. 76). The authors reported that the opportunity to work as an acting headteacher

tended to "confirm the view that the post offered considerable scope and gave many a strong sense of success" *(p. 76)*. Interestingly, the authors found that half of their sample applied for a permanent headship following their acting headteacher experience, and that 17% of those who had decided not to apply perceived "their period as acting heads had been important in influencing that decision" *(p. 78)*. The authors conclude by asserting that "the professional development dimension of acting headship is less acknowledged than it might be" (p. 80).

Table 3: *Women's work-style preferences*

Home-centred	Adaptive	Work-centred
20% of women Varies 10% - 30%	60% of women Varies 40% - 80%	20% of women Varies 10% - 30%
Children and family are the main priorities throughout life	This group is the most diverse and includes women who want to combine work and family, plus drifters and unplanned careers	Childfree women are concentrated here. Main priority in life is employment or equivalent activities such as politics, sport, art.
Prefer not to work	Want to work, but not totally committed to work career.	Committed to work or equivalent activities.

Source: Hakim, 2000, p.158

Guihen (2017) found that "Home-centred women are believed to prefer the private realm of the home and therefore prioritise their family and other life commitments over work" (p. 118). Using the work of Hakim (2000), she explains that this group of women is said to "accept the sexual division of labour in the home" (Hakim, 2000, p. 159). 'Work-centred women' on the other hand are argued to prioritise their public lives, careers or "some activity other than motherhood and family life" *(p. 164)*. Comprising of approximately 20% of women, they adopt what could be described as a 'male' model of career, and are more likely than any other group to be childfree *(p. 164)*. 'Adaptive women' are said to lie somewhere in between the extremes of 'home-centred' and 'work-centred' women*.* This group includes those who prefer to combine paid work and family life without prioritising either sphere *(p. 165)*. Hakim (2000) argues that it is often yet erroneously believed that this group of women are representative of all women. In reality, she argues,

these women represent approximately 60% of the female population residing in 'prosperous societies' (p. 165).

The preference theory concentrates on the importance of "choice and individualisation" (Guihen, 2017). Hakim (2006) maintains that constraints and "social structural factors are of declining importance" (p. 286). Via the lens of her theory, Hakim argues that "men will continue to outnumber women in the top jobs, simply because they try much harder to get them" *(p. 290). Furthermore, she maintains that heterogeneity "is the source not only of polarisation in women's labour market behaviour but also of the unequal labour market outcomes between women and men" (McRae, 2003, p. 319). Having explored Hakim's Preference Theory, I will progress to discuss its potential criticisms.

Critique and the consideration of constraint

Researchers have challenged Hakim's Preference Theory on the grounds that it does not place enough emphasis on the social structures and constraints that frame and shape women's lives.

Broadbridge (2010), found the career narratives of women executives and directors working in the UK retail sector, "were infused with notions of choice but these choices are often constrained and are related to traditional and stereotypical views of gender roles and to outdated company cultures and attitudes" (p. 256). She concludes that Hakim's argument that women have 'genuine choices' between employment and family life in view of such restriction is unconvincing. McRae (2003) comes to a similar conclusion, and suggests that a serious weakness of Preference Theory is the absence of any consideration of the constraints that women face in the labour market. She argues "that a complete explanation of women's labour market choices after childbirth, and of the outcomes of those choices, depends as much on understanding the constraints that differentially affect women as it does on understanding their personal preferences" (p. 318).

Arguably, in failing to take into account the numerous challenges and restrictions that women face both in the labour market and society at large,

Hakim effectively blames women for their under-representation in leadership positions. This is an argument advanced by Broadbridge (2010) who observes:

> Hakim claims that preference theory predicts that men retain their dominance in the labour market because only a minority of women are prepared to prioritise their jobs in the same way as men. Thus, she places the onus on women rather than organisations and societal attitudes for women's minority status in the labour market (p. 248).

Another potential weakness of Preference Theory is that her classification of women's preferences perhaps takes something away from the individuality and uniqueness of women's life experiences and the choices they face. Characterising women as 'adaptive' for example is to group individuals together and suggest they have similar or comparable lives and careers.

The readers' attention therefore is directed towards the group as opposed to individual's lived experiences. These reservations are shared by Broadbridge (2010) who argues that the categories used to 'explain' women's heterogeneity may not reflect their experiences (p. 257). I share the reservations outlined above, and therefore have rejected Hakim's Preference Theory as a lens through which to view my own research. I have chosen instead to adopt a theoretical lens using a feminist framework based on Stanley and Wise's (1993) three themes of 'women's oppression', 'personal is political' and 'feminist consciousness'. I also draw on Giddens' (1979) theory of agency and knowledgeability of the individual, and Archer's, (2007) concept of the internal conversation. Together this takes into account the enabling and constraining influences shaping women's career decisions as well as the heterogeneity that exists between individuals. This lens is explored both later on in this chapter, and in the findings and discussion sections of this thesis.

Archer's reflexive encounter with structure and agency

The literature concerned with women's under-representation in school headship suggests that women find themselves caught between constraint and enablement, agency and structure. The problem of the relationship between structure and agency is one "that lies at the heart of social theory and the philosophy of social science" (Thompson, 1989, p. 56). Some theorists have generally perceived these concepts to be opposed or operating in an inflexible dualism; they have tended to emphasise the choices and actions of the individual *or* the constraining power of social or organisational structures (Elliott, 2001). For example, certain fields of thought such as phenomenology and interpretative philosophies tend to privilege individual agency, while other theoretical lenses such as structuralist Marxism privilege structure (Archer, 2010, p. 225).

The theory of structuration proposed by sociologist Anthony Giddens links structure and agency. Within his argument, Giddens places "social practices, practical consciousness, and the reflexive individual at the forefront of theoretical concern" (Tucker, 1998, p. 98).

Thompson (1989) argues "few concepts in the social sciences are more basic and essential, yet more ambiguous and contested, than that of structure" (p. 62). The term is often conceptualised as being heavily linked to the experience of institutional constraint (Elliott, 2001, p. 294). Giddens (1979) however defines 'structure' as "rules and resources, recursively implicated in the production of social systems" (p. 64). He sees structure as consisting of 'structuring properties' "which exist only in actual social practices" (Tucker, 1998, p. 84). The creation of 'social systems', in Giddens' view, is linked to social interaction; he argues that systems are reproduced and regularised via social relations "between actors and collectivities" (1979, p. 66). Moving away from the traditional association between structure and constraint, Giddens maintains structure "is always both constraining and enabling" (1984, p. 25). This is the idea that structure has the potential to not only limit human experience and opportunity, but also to facilitate human action. Giddens argues therefore "that there are few situations in which

behaviour is determined completely" (Tucker, 1998, p. 85). What follows is an account of Giddens' structuration theory.

I will use Giddens' (1984) and Archer's (2010) frameworks to make meaning of the stories of female special school headteachers, drawing on themes and comparisons and developing my own analytical thinking during the analysis stage of my thesis.

Giddens and structuration theory

Giddens' ideas of agency or human 'action' is "a continuous flow of conduct" (Giddens, 1979, p. 55) is caused by individual agents acting autonomously. Agency is believed not to be a combination of singular or discrete 'acts', but a stream of activity (Giddens, 1984, p. 3). Giddens' definition of agency is linked with individual's ability to exercise power in the context in which they are situated. He states "action depends upon the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14). Outlined in his work, there is a sense that in order for behaviour or individuals to be agentic, the actor must have the freedom and power to 'act otherwise' (Giddens, 1979, p. 56).

Giddens highlights a 'stratification model of the agent' (1979, p. 56; 1984, p. 5) in order to explore the relationship between the individual and his or her activities. The model shows what he considers to be the central features of action and can be found in Figure 5.

Figure 5: *Giddens' stratification model of action*
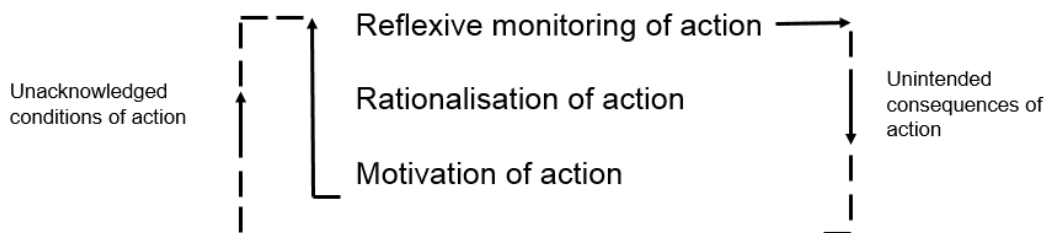
Source: Giddens, 1984, p. 5

Within the model in Figure 5, a particular image of the individual actor emerges. Human agents are perceived to be highly knowledgeable and aware. Giddens (1984) claims that "the reflexive monitoring of activity is a chronic feature of everyday action" (p. 5). This idea highlights that individuals observe not only their activities, but the context in which they are situated. Giddens states that actors are also rational in that they are able to explain or give reasons for their behaviour. This demonstrates that conscious awareness and activity are closely related.

The cognitive functions of reflexivity and rationalisation (illustrated in the centre of Figure 5) are believed to be "directly bound up with the continuity of action" in that they refer to the ways in which actions are carried out (Giddens, 1984, p. 6). The 'motivation of action' on the other hand refers to the wants and needs – both known and unknown to our consciousness – that drive us to act in particular ways. As well as focusing on the reflexive and "purposive character of human behaviour" (Giddens, 1979, p. 56), the model also shows that some of our actions are shaped, situated and 'bounded' by unintended consequences. These in turn create unacknowledged conditions of action. Consequences and conditions that exist outside of individual awareness appear to suggest that there are layers of human consciousness that are beyond language or rationalisation. Giddens argues that the agency of the human agent comprises of three levels of cognition and motivation:

1. *The discursive consciousness* – this is the layer of cognition where individuals are able to put into words and give reasons for their social conditions, motivations and behaviours (Giddens, 1984; Tucker, 1998).

2. *The practical consciousness* – this layer consists of the beliefs and knowledge we have about our social conditions, motivations and behaviours that we are unable to put into words. They therefore remain unarticulated (Giddens, 1984; Tucker, 1998).

3. *Unconscious motives/cognition* – this is the layer of cognition that refers to that which we cannot give verbal expression to and is located deep in our

unconscious (Giddens, 1984; Tucker, 1998).

Giddens gives these three terms as a substitute for the Freudian triad of the ego, super-ego and the id (Giddens, 1984, p. 7). He argues that much of what actors know about the social world in which they live resides in their 'practical consciousness' (Thompson, 1989, p. 59). Giddens' arguments suggest that human beings have a good understanding of and a propensity to monitor the activities they engage in. Agents then are presented in Giddens' work as highly reflexive and knowledgeable.

Linking agency and structure

Giddens (1979, 1984) states that there is an interrelationship between social structures and individual human agency. Instead of perceiving the concepts as being independent and opposed in a rigid dualism, Giddens (1984) maintains that human agents and social structures "represent a duality", one he terms the "duality of structure" (p. 25). While taking autonomous 'action' in the social word, Giddens (1984) argues, individuals or 'agents' not only use social structures in order to act, they also reproduce them or slightly modify them which in turn creates the circumstances for future action, agency and personal choice i.e. "the conditions that make such action possible" (p. 26). Giddens therefore proposes a mobile, fluid and mutually dependent relationship between structure and agency. The two concepts are perceived to "presuppose one another" (Giddens, 1979, p. 53). Structure (often perceived to be constraining) is believed to have "no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day–to–day activity" (Giddens, 1984, p. 26). Structures are therefore reliant on human agents. Giddens' work allows for the possibility of a malleable society in which social change is possible. Indeed, Giddens (1979) argues that "change, or its potentiality, is thus inherent in all moments of social reproduction" (p. 114). In an attempt to sum up Giddens' structuration theory, Archer (2010) states "what Giddens is seeking to enfold here are two views of social institutions – institutions as causes of action (which has certain deterministic overtones) and institutions as embodiments of action (which has more voluntaristic connotations)" (p. 229). She argues that by

interweaving and collapsing the divide between agency and structure, Giddens also endeavours to dismantle the dualism which is often said to exist between determinism and voluntarism. The two, it seems, become inextricably linked in Giddens' work.

Knowledgeable actors

At the centre of Giddens' theory of structuration lies a particular conception of the individual as agentic and reflexive. Human beings, in Giddens' view, "are neither 'cultural dopes' nor mere 'supports' of social relations, but are skillful actors who know a great deal about the world in which they act" (Thompson, 1989, p. 58). Individuals are reflexive, capable of monitoring their actions and articulating reasons for their behaviour. Agency is therefore linked with knowledge, reason and intelligence (Tucker, 1998). All of these faculties are said to be present when individuals produce and reproduce the social structures surrounding them. Within his theory of structuration then Giddens assigns "a prime role to the knowledgeability of actors in producing and reproducing their society" (Archer, 2010, p. 227). For Giddens (1991), modernity is a 'risk culture'. It is a social climate that is full of possibility and options but it is also potentially hazardous. In the face of uncertainty, Giddens (1991) argues, individuals need to construct, organise and sustain themselves in a reflexive manner. The individual is said to embark upon a "reflexive project of the self". Giddens (1991) contends that this project "consists in the sustaining of coherent, continually revised, biographical narratives ... in the context of multiple choice" (p. 5). It seems that through Giddens' theoretical lens, human beings not only have the agency to control their actions and the social systems around them, but also the power to create and re-create their self-identities.

Giddens' concepts have been linked to those of Erving Goffman. Arguing that Goffman's dramaturgical perspective has been under-utilised and undervalued by social theorists, Giddens believes that Goffman's work "captures the central sociological fact that people are skilled agents who engage in very complex social interactions" (Tucker, 1998, p. 78). Goffman (1959) uses a theatrical metaphor to explore the ways in which individuals

actively construct and present themselves in our society. At the centre of Goffman's work, lies the knowledgeable individual who is actively engaging in impression management, "staging a character" (p. 203) and presenting themselves in a particular way to the external world. This idea of constructed and performed selves resonates with Stephen Ball's idea of fabrications i.e. versions of an organisation/person which do not exist but are "produced purposefully in order to be accountable" (Ball, 2003, p. 224). For Goffman (1959), the individual is "a harried fabricator of impressions involved in the all-too-human task of staging a performance" (p. 244). In presenting oneself, he argues, we utilise rehearsed 'scripts', make good use of our 'settings' and 'make up' our personal appearance and mannerisms. In his work, Goffman distinguishes between the 'front stage' and the 'back stage' regions of this performance of the self. 'Front stage' is where our performances take place. This is a space where we manipulate our audience members into thinking we 'are' a particular way. Yet our performances are carefully composed and crafted in 'a back region' or 'backstage'. It is in this 'back region' "that illusions and impressions are openly constructed" and we learn to manage impressions of ourselves (Goffman, 1959, p. 114). This region however is kept hidden from all observers. Access to this region of a performance, Goffman (1959) argues, is "controlled not only by the performers but by others. Individuals voluntarily stay away from regions into which they have not been invited" *(*p. 223). For Giddens (1979), "Goffman's contrast between front and back regions in which social performances are carried on is one of great interest" (p. 207). At the crux of Goffman's work is an image of the individual who is actively organising and controlling their activities to give off a particular impression of themselves. This performance is bounded but also assisted by the systems or institutions surrounding him or her. Giddens (1984) maintains that Goffman, along with ethnomethodology, helped to establish that "the routinised character of most social activity is something that has to be 'worked at' continually by those who sustain it in their day-to-day conduct" (p. 86).

Giddens' work provides an important lens through which to view the stories and experiences of special school headteachers. It emphasises the agency

and knowledgeability of the individual special school headteacher as well as their capacity to act in the face of structural constraint. This, therefore, is an important feature of my theoretical framework and lens.

There have been several critiques of Giddens' work. For this chapter, I will focus on those of Margaret Archer and John Thompson. Critiquing structuration theory, Archer argues that it is necessary to treat both concepts as analytically separate. She states that a clear distinction between structure and agency allows for a greater degree of theorising about the relationship between the two concepts and the circumstances in which either concept thrives or predominates (Archer, 2010, p. 247). One of Archer's main criticisms of Giddens' work is that he "cannot acknowledge that structure and action work on different time intervals ... structure logically predates the action(s) which transform it" (Archer, 2010, p. 238). She believes to collapse or conflate the two concepts into one another is to conceal such differences. Another of Archer's criticisms focuses on the lack of answers that Giddens gives to 'when' questions. She asks "when can actors be transformative (which involves specification of degrees of freedom) and when are they trapped into replication (which involves specification of the stringency of constraints)?" (p. 231). She maintains that Giddens' theory of structuration does not stipulate the conditions under which voluntarism and/or determinism will occur and therefore "these different possibilities remain undifferentiated by Giddens" (Archer, 2010, p. 231). Above all, Archer accuses Giddens of augmenting voluntarism and diminishing constraint (p. 232). She states that Giddens' theory of structuration "produces a complementary neglect of institutional characteristics in their own right. What this omits are characteristics of which people may well be aware ... but which constrain them nonetheless" (Archer, 2010, pp. 232-3). Archer (2010) believes constraint is hard-wearing and that by underestimating its power Giddens "artificially inflates the degrees of freedom for action" (p. 234).

Thompson's (1989) critique of Giddens' theory of structuration focuses on two points: (1) Giddens' definition of structure and (2) the role of structural constraint. He observes, "Giddens' proposal to conceive of structure in terms

of rules and resources is of questionable value, for it is a proposal which generates more confusion than it dispels and which tends to obscure some important issues" *(p. 62).* He argues that 'rules' and 'resources' do little to help readers comprehend the nature of social structures. Furthermore, he argues that Giddens' definition of a 'rule' is shrouded in ambiguity. Giddens, Thompson (1989) maintains, "does little to clarify the precise character of the rules which could be said, on Giddens' account, to comprise social structure" *(p. 64).*

Like Archer (2010), Thompson (1989) also accuses Giddens of underplaying or neglecting the role of structural constraint in our society. The author questions "whether, in stressing the enabling character of structure, Giddens does justice to the role of structural constraint ... In what senses do these rules operate as constraints on possible courses of action?" *(p. 72).* In his analysis of Giddens' work, Thompson (1989) observes that there are circumstances in which "structural constraint may so limit the options of the individual that agency is effectively dissolved" (p. 73). Like Archer (2010), he concludes by arguing that structure and agency are "neither contradictory nor complementary terms, but rather two poles which stand in a relation of tension with each other" *(p. 75).*

Using Giddens and Archer ideas will provide an emphasis of the agency and knowledgeability of the individual special school headteacher story as well as understanding their individual capacity to act in the face of structural constraint.

Margaret Archer and the internal conversation

Giddens' ideas of the knowledgeable and reflexive actor is one which I have found to be helpful in my work on the women special school headteachers' experience of headship therefore in my view, a more convincing relationship between agency and structure is given by Margaret Archer who has "made a significant contribution to the development of critical realism and, more narrowly, to the structure and agency debate" (Akram, 2012, p. 47). Noting that Giddens' structuration theory interconnects agency and structure, Archer

proposed a 'morphogenetic approach' in which she endeavours to preserve the dichotomy between agency and structure in order to explore the interaction between them (Archer, 2010; King, 2010). Archer (1995) defines her morphogenetic perspective in the following way:

> The 'morpho' element is an acknowledgement that society has no pre-set form or preferred state: the 'genetic' part is a recognition that it takes its shape from, and is formed by, agents, originating from the intended and unintended consequences of their activities (p. 5).

Archer (1995) argues that within this definition there is a recognition that structure and agency "have to be related rather than conflated" (p. 6). In her later work, Archer suggests that reflexivity is the means by which individuals navigate social structures and forms of constraint. She perceives this reflexive process to be mediatory i.e. "human reflexive deliberations play a crucial role in mediating between" the "distinctive and irreducible properties and powers" of structure and agency (Archer, 2003, p. 14). Within her work, Archer defines 'reflexivity' as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (Archer, 2007, p. 4).

The issue of reflexivity can also be found in Giddens' work on the 'reflexive project of the self'. He defines this as "the process whereby self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives" (Giddens, 1991, p. 244). This is perceived to be an ongoing process through which we create "coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives" (p. 5). This is different to Archer's reflexive process which is said to be an activity that occurs within our own minds, and is the means through which we evaluate and make sense of the world around us (Archer, 2007, p. 4). Archer calls this reflexive process 'the internal conversation' and, in doing so, suggests a concern with the introspection that individuals engage in. Writing in 2003, Archer defines the 'internal conversation' as the mechanism "through which reflexivity towards self, society and the relationship between them is exercised" (p. 9). The inner dialogue about self in society will enable the participants in this study to become active and not passive agents. When

the participant becomes an active agent it involves the defining, refining and prioritising their individual concerns, that can lead to new projects and practices.

Perceiving human beings to be 'fundamentally evaluative', Archer argues that this interplay between structure and agency, objective forces and subjective action, comprises of three stages:

1. Structural and cultural properties objectively shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and inter alia possess generative powers of constraint and enablement.

2. Subjects' own constellations of concerns, as subjectively defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality: nature, practice and the social.

3. Courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of subjects who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances (Archer, 2007, p. 16).

Our internal dialogue then is said to not only mediate the influence of the social, cultural and political structures that shape our lived experiences, but also to govern our response or 'stance' towards them (Archer, 2007, p. 15). This theory maintains that our reflexive powers are responsible for our concerns, the projects which we pursue and the practices we adopt *(*p. 16). Our internal conversations are also said to "define what courses of action we take in given situations" (Archer, 2012, p. 6). It must be noted however that, in emphasising the reflexive, personal power of individuals, Archer is not asserting that people are simply free to "make what they please of their circumstances" (Archer, 2007, p. 16). She suggests therefore that our positionalities and experiences within society are framed and shaped to a certain degree by the structural forces surrounding us. Special school headteachers experience a range of structural forces including managing risk, performativity and stress and conversely the power of headship and making meaningful differences to the lives of young people.

Archer (2012) observes that people "who are similarly placed do not respond

uniformly" (p. 6). She suggests that even though human beings hold conversations or monologues with themselves, different people exercise the power differently (Caetano, 2015, p. 62). Through the lens of Archer's work, then, women special school deputy headteachers confronted with the decision as to whether or not to aspire towards and apply for special school headship will not think about their circumstances in the same way. Using the power of headship and making a meaningful difference to the lives of young people can encourage some women to aspire towards headship regardless of the unpredictability they may perceive as being ingrained in the special school headteacher role. One of the key elements of Archer's theory is that human beings "are radically heterogeneous" and therefore do not share common modes of reflexivity (Archer, 2003, p. 134). The reflexive vehicle they opt to navigate the structure – agency landscape will therefore differ depending on the individual concerned. Conducting empirical research with twenty interviewees, Archer (2003) found internal conversations to be so diverse she outlines three different types of reflexivity: 'communicative reflexivity', 'autonomous reflexivity' and 'meta-reflexivity' (p. 342). A description of these modes can be found in Figure 6.

Figure 6: *Archer's modes of reflexivity*

Communicative Reflexivity: Internal Conversations need to be confirmed and completed by others before they lead to action.

Autonomous Reflexivity: Internal Conversations are self-contained, leading directly to action.

Meta-Reflexivity: Internal Conversations critically evaluate previous inner dialogues and are critical about effective action in society.

Source: Archer, 2012, p. 13

The first mode of reflexivity Archer outlines is termed 'communicative reflexivity'. Those exercising this mode are said to operate via what Archer terms, 'thought and talk' i.e. they seek to articulate and share their thinking,

decision-making and dilemmas with others. Archer (2003) argues that for this group "decisions about what to do, how to act and ultimately, who to be, are held open to the dialogical influences of those with whom they share their concerns" (p. 167). This mode of reflexivity therefore suggests a certain mistrust in their own as well as faith in others' perceptions (Archer, 2003, 2007). It is argued that this group experiences a great deal of 'contextual continuity', and tend to identify their friends and family as "their ultimate concern" (Archer, 2003, p. 169). It is notable, for the purposes of my study, that Archer's 'communicative reflexives' "accommodated work by voluntarily reducing their occupational aspirations, whenever these clashed with the (perceived) needs of family and friendship" (p. 213). This group are said to be pragmatic, short-term planners who "confront a problem only when it confronts them" (Archer, 2007, p. 275).

The second mode of reflexivity Archer outlines is 'autonomous reflexivity'. Those labelled autonomous reflexives are said to be satisfied with their own internal conversations and, unlike the communicative reflexives, do not require the opinions of others to take decisive action (Archer, 2003, p. 210). The internal dialogue of autonomous reflexives therefore remains private, and there is argued to be a strong belief among these individualists that "they, and everyone else, must take personal responsibility for themselves" (Archer, 2003, p. 214). This group are argued to be self-reliant and decisive in that "their decision-making process is premeditative and their decisions are premeditated, not spontaneous" (Archer, 2007, p. 286). According to Archer's theory, autonomous reflexives prioritise work above all else and hence their inter-personal relations and well-being are often "subordinated to this ultimate concern" (Archer, 2003, p. 213). This group are said to "know what they want" and act strategically towards both constraints and enablement's to achieve their goals (p. 254). They are believed to aim "to improve upon their social positioning and, if successful, become upwardly socially mobile" (Archer, 2007, p. 98).

The third mode of reflexivity Archer delineates is termed 'meta-reflexivity'. Meta-reflexives are those who are "reflexive about our own acts of reflexivity

... the internal conversation is not about the proposition itself but about why she herself uttered it" (Archer, 2003, p. 255). This group are said to "go through a great deal of soul searching about why this should be the case, and how they can change themselves and their comportment to establish the harmony which they seek" *(p. 258). Archer labels these individuals 'idealists' who are willing to suffer constraint and relinquish enablement's "in the attempt to live out their ideal" (Archer, 2007, p. 98). They are said to be "society's critics" who exhibit "deep concern for the underdog, the oppressed, and the globally deprived ... these are people with a vocation (or in search of one) in which they can invest themselves and which is expressive of their ideal" (Archer, 2003, p. 258). Interestingly, this group are said to be 'contextually unsettled', subversive and "constantly evaluate their situations in the light of their concerns and not vice versa. When situations are deemed too disparate from their ideals, then they quit, which is what makes for the biographical volatility of the 'meta-reflexive'" (Archer, 2003, p. 293). For some special school headteachers meta-reflexivity may lead to the reflexivity of becoming fractured and as a consequence the fractured reflexives are those whose "internal conversations" (Archer, 2010) start to intensify their distress and disorientation rather than leading purposeful courses of action.

Archer proposes a fourth mode of reflexivity entitled 'fractured reflexivity'. This is a group who, "instead of leading to purposeful courses of action, the self-talk of the 'fractured reflexive' is primarily expressive. Its effect is to intensify affect" (Archer, 2003, p. 303). It is anticipated however, that for the purposes of my study and its focus on women who successfully fulfil a role which requires a great deal of reflexive power, consideration of the 'fractured reflexive' will not be necessary. I believe, however, that the other three modes have a great deal of utility when considering the stories of special school headteachers' experience of headship.

Archer claims that "practising a particular kind of internal conversation ... has consequences for his or her life history" (Archer, 2007, p. 269). Her work also suggests that, although individuals exercise different modes of reflexivity at different times, most people have a dominant form of internal conversation

(Archer, 2012, p. 12). One of the central features of this theory is the idea that the 'stance' that individuals take towards society, its constraints and enablement's, is dependent on the mode of reflexivity exercised. Archer (2003) found that "'communicative reflexives' systematically evaded constraints and enablement's, 'autonomous reflexives' acted strategically toward them, and 'meta-reflexives' behaved subversively by absorbing the structural costs of their actions" (p. 300). Modes of reflexivity are therefore said to influence individual's perspectives and responses to the situations they find themselves confronted with. Archer (2012) suggests that social change and decreased 'contextual continuity' in our society influences the mode of internal conversation individuals will adopt. She argues communicative reflexivity is waning in our society because "the speed and penetration of change in the advanced parts of the world is fundamentally destructive of the 'contextual continuity' upon which communicative reflexivity depends" *(p. 305)*. Interestingly, she suggests that meta-reflexivity and fractured reflexivity are becoming more common while levels of autonomous reflexivity remain constant *(p. 305)*.

Archer's theory potentially raises questions about the extent to which a researcher can ever access another individual's 'internal conversation' in order to study it. Archer (2003) addresses this potential criticism by asserting:

> All research touching upon our 'attitudes', 'beliefs', 'outlooks' or 'intentions' taps into syntheses of our mental activities; to explore the 'internal conversation' does not entail qualitatively different difficulties. That it is difficult is undeniable, but if it is deemed impossible, then so must all the research topics with which it has just been bracketed (p. 156).

Like Giddens' theory of structuration, Archer's morphogenetic approach and the notion of the internal conversation have been subject to criticism. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on those criticisms outlined by Caetano (2015). She argues that "the emphasis assigned to agency, due to the central focus on reflexive deliberations, results in the minimisation of the role

of social structures in determining action" (p. 63). The author expresses concern that an emphasis on reflexivity may result in little attention being paid to the role that socialisation and social context play in framing and shaping our lived experiences *(*pp. 64-66). This is a concern that is shared by both Akram (2012) and Mutch (2004). Archer's work has also been criticised for privileging internal means of mediation over external forms. Caetano (2015) maintains that "the external conversation people have with one another in specific social contexts should also be taken into account in the explanation of human conduct, as they contribute equally to the definition and negotiation of personal concerns and projects" (p. 67). Here Caetano seems to be arguing that the concept of 'communicative reflexivity' does not adequately account for the role that others play in our deliberations. I would disagree and cite Archer's assertion that individuals are capable of switching between modes of reflexivity depending on their needs (Archer, 2012, p. 12). It is therefore possible to suggest that autonomous, meta and fractured reflexives have the capacity within Archer's theory to consult others thus accounting for the role of external conversation in human conduct.

Caetano (2015) proposes a number of other criticisms of Archer's work. She suggests, for instance, that Archer's theory does not "acknowledge that one person can be highly reflexive in certain social situations, but strongly guided by structural constraints in others" *(*p. 68). Caetano also points out that even though Archer's work is supported by empirical research, her sample narrowly focuses on a "group of educated young people" *(*p. 70). Consequently, she questions the generalisability of Archer's theory to the wider population. While acknowledging the criticisms outlined by Caetano (2015) and recognising the limitations of any one theory, I have chosen to adopt Archer's theory as a lens through which to view the special headteacher stories. I believe that through the lens of Margaret Archer's work on the internal conversation, it is possible to perceive the career thinking and the type of reflexivity that individual women exhibit as being shaped by the dynamic interplay between their "nascent 'concerns' (the importance of what they care about) and their 'context' (the continuity or discontinuity of their social environment)" (Archer, 2007, p. 96). Archer's

work would allow me to perceive the heterogeneous concerns, decision-making and stances that exist between my participants. In opting to utilise this theory, I am making an argument for the role of the individual, heterogeneity and complexity in women special school headteacher stories and experience of headship. This argument assumes a phenomenological approach and a commitment to harnessing the idiographic nature of experience, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Theoretical framework

This chapter addresses the three ideas on which I have built my theoretical framework. These are:

1. The relationship between feminist theory and personal practice, and between theory, experience and research. The three themes central to feminist theory enable an exploration of meaning. The themes 'Women are oppressed', 'the personal is political', and 'there is feminist consciousness' will be considered whilst investigating the career advancement of women special school leaders and headteachers. The themes imply that women leaders and headteachers are a heterogeneous group, and it is by focusing on the individual that the interpretation of meaning will emerge within the diverges and converges.

2. Gidden's theory emphasises the agency and knowledgeability of the individual as well as his capacity to act within and in response to structural constraints.

3. Archer argues that individuals mediate constraining and enabling factors via internal conversations. She states that this reflexive process is not the same for everyone, and that our inner dialogues influence our projects, concerns and decision making.

These points are illustrated in Figure 7 (Appendix 3) which seeks to highlight the centrality of the individual special school headteacher within this thesis.

Summary

This chapter began by critiquing the position of women in a national labour market with a feminist perspective. It reviewed evidence to suggest that women are under-represented in a wide range of leadership positions including school headship. I then examined a variety of theories explaining the constraining and enabling influences women encounter on the road to special school leadership. Noting the complex interrelationship between structure and agency within this body of literature, the third section of this chapter explored the work of Anthony Giddens and Margaret Archer as part of my theoretical framework. This chapter concluded with an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning my study of special school headteachers' experience of headship.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

To do research is always to question the way we experience the world.

(Van Manen, 1990, p. 5)

Introduction

In this chapter I explain the research design of the study. The design was developed as a result of the pilot project. The chapter begins by summarising the aims of the project, and outlining its research questions. The chapter then moves on to explore the feminist principles and ethical framework that guided my research design using reflexivity from the pilot project. The middle section of this chapter is concerned with the methodology which formed the research design. The rationale for employing this interpretive phenomenological methodology as well as the specificities of data collection and data analysis (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)) are discussed. Here I highlight the links between the individual participant, phenomenology and IPA's idiographic commitment. I then move to explore the importance of reflexivity in IPA research. The final part of the chapter concerns the notion of 'quality' in qualitative research design. Using criteria put forth by Yardley (2000) and Smith (2011) to structure this discussion, the steps taken to ensure the validity of my work are considered. Finally, I will reflect on my positionality as a researcher and the potential limitations of this investigation. As part of the research design, I reflected on the work of the pilot study carried out in the initial stages of my research, (Appendix 7).

In the pilot interview I explored the leadership story of one woman headteacher and was able to analyse and reflect on the success of the initial research design.

Aims and research questions

My research questions are aimed to enable me to research why the participants decide to take their journey towards headship and if there are any challenges that women must navigate in their leadership journey and

how women special headteachers see their leadership story developing.

This thesis presents a detailed, idiographic examination of how individual women special school headteachers make sense of their experience of headship past, present and future. This study also aims to explore any challenges that women must navigate in their leadership journey. It seeks to gain an insight into participants' individual stories and how these influence the prospect of their aspiring towards and applying for headship. Individuals and the idiosyncratic ways in which they understand and ascribe meaning to their social and professional worlds are at the heart of this research. The final research design was an interpretive phenomenological analysis situated within a constructivist paradigm. Unstructured interviews were conducted with six special school headteacher participants, using a feminist framework and drawing on Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity (2007) and the work of Giddens (1991).

Ethical implications

Adopting a feminist perspective has a number of ethical implications for the qualitative researcher. Feminist scholars such as Mathison (2014), highlight the ways in which traditional and dominant ways of knowing have marginalised women's voices. Consequently, doing feminist research necessitates an ethical commitment to uncovering women's "subjugated knowledge", silenced understandings and hidden perceptions (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 3). Stanley and Wise (1993) believe feminist research to be 'corrective' in that it is "concerned with filling in the gaps in our knowledge about women" (p. 30). To fulfil this ethical requirement and 'give voice' to the lived experiences and perceptions of women special school headteachers, I needed to act in accordance with the ethical regulations and codes of practice governing the work of educational researchers from a feminist standpoint. The research detailed in this thesis adheres to the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Educational Research Association (2011), and Sheffield Hallam University Ethics Code of Conduct (2017), as viewed through a feminist lens. In addition, all interview data has been transcribed, used and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018).

Secondly, adopting a feminist perspective requires a commitment to creating an empowering research process for the individual participant. Feminist researchers question the "legitimacy of research that does not empower oppressed and otherwise invisible groups" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 40). Research conducted through a feminist lens therefore aims to produce knowledge that is useful both on individual and societal levels (Ramazanoglu, 2002, p. 147). Feminist researchers produce knowledge for and about women because they "feel an obligation to seek opportunities for social good" (Zigo, 2001, p. 353). Aiming to empower my participants, I ensured that the interviews I conducted gave individual special school headteachers the opportunity to critically reflect on their experiences, perceptions and sense-making. I aimed to design a study that would illuminate the issues around gender and career advancement as my participants saw them. In the long term, I hope that the wider dissemination of my results will maximise the potential emancipatory benefits of my research.

Thirdly, those adopting a feminist lens aim to foster non-exploitative and collaborative research relationships with their participants (Letherby, 2003). Writing from a feminist perspective, Patai (1991) argues "respect is a minimum condition if we are not to treat others as mere means to our own ends - if we are not, in other words, to reproduce the very practices of domination that we seek to challenge" (p. 148). As a feminist researcher I have an ethical duty to not only safeguard and promote the welfare and respectful treatment of individual participants, but also to ensure the assumptions, on which my methodology and research practice are based, challenge unquestioned norms and beliefs about power relations and the researcher-participant relationship. As part of fostering non-exploitative research relationships with my participants, full and informed consent was obtained from all of those who took part. Every participant was made aware that their participation in this project was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. Participant privacy was of the utmost concern. Participants' names, places of work, colleagues, family members and other identifiable details such as home towns have been

anonymised throughout this thesis via the use of pseudonyms. Furthermore, all individual participants were treated fairly and with respect. A compassionate and non-judgmental approach to what was said was taken at all times. I did not want the research process to be perceived as an imposition. Consequently, the time and venue for interviews were determined by each individual participant. Special school headteachers were also given the option of having a face-to-face or telephone interview. This ensured that the data collection process was as convenient and accessible for participants as possible. Lastly, I ensured that participants were informed at the beginning of each interview of the possibility that they might find some of their narrative painful to tell. I further explained the possibility of unequal power relations within their story and reflections. I reassured participants that they could opt out or stop the interview process at any time.

Finally, a feminist standpoint requires the researcher to be highly reflexive (Etherington, 2004). Berger (2015) defines reflexivity as "the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (p. 220). Being deliberately self-aware throughout the research process and acknowledging that we cannot step outside of the social world in order to study it presents a "challenge to the norm of 'objectivity' that assumes knowledge can be collected in a pure, uncontaminated way" (Letherby, 2011, p. 64). Having defined what I mean by a 'feminist perspective' and the ethical implications of this stance, I will now move on to explain and justify the research design employed in this investigation.

Philosophical anchorage and methodology

Crotty (1998) argues that there are four basic elements of any research process: (1) epistemology; (2) theoretical perspective; (3) methodology; and (4) research methods. An *epistemology* is a philosophical theory of knowledge that is concerned with the ways in which we think about the social world, "who can be a knower and what can be known" (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 5). Willig (2008) states that arriving at one's epistemological position involves

"thinking about the nature of knowledge itself, about its scope and about the validity and reliability of claims to knowledge" (p. 2). Epistemology is related to ontology, "the study of being" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10) or our assumptions about "the nature of the world" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 23). Crotty (1998) argues that there is an interrelatedness between one's epistemological and ontological stance. He maintains that issues of ontology and epistemology "arise together" in a research project and that both stances tend to be complementary (Crotty, 1998, p. 11). A *theoretical perspective* is defined as the "philosophical stance informing the methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

Crotty argues that there are several theoretical assumptions from which researchers can choose. These include positivist and interpretivist perspectives. A *methodology* is defined as a "strategy, plan of action, process or design" such as grounded theory or action research (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Harding (1987) argues that discussions of methodology and data collection methods are sometimes conflated. She argues for a strict distinction between the two terms delineating methodology as "a theory and analysis of how research should proceed" and *methods* as "techniques for gathering evidence" (Harding, 1987, p. 2). A similar definition is put forth by Crotty (1998) who defines research methods as "the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data" (p. 3). Cited examples include observation and statistical analysis.

An outline of the qualitative research design employed in this thesis can be found in Figure 8. It is based on the framework posited by Crotty (1998) as I found this to be a useful tool in structuring my thinking. The next section of this chapter will explore each of the components of my research design in turn.

The research design below outlines the subjectivist ontology that will be adopted throughout my thesis, perceiving the social world as being constructed by individuals, within this epistemological stance lies contextual constructionism and it is through this position that I adopt throughout my IPA study.

Figure 8: *Research design*
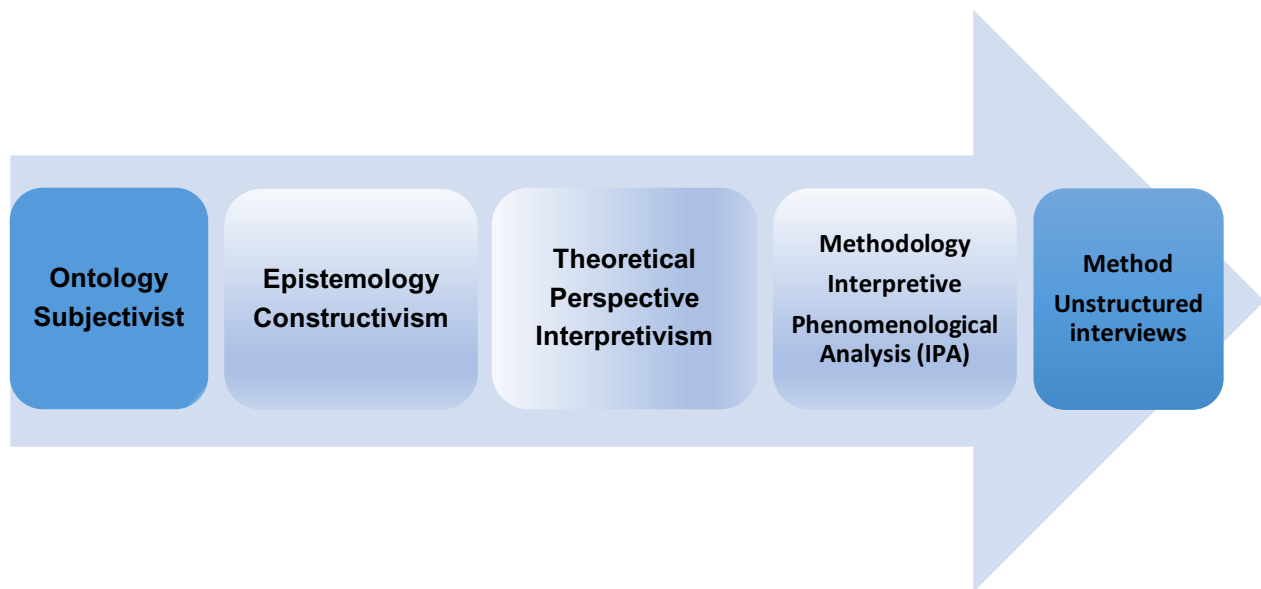
Ontological and epistemological stance

I chose to use qualitative research methodologies to investigate, interpret and describe social reality. I am working with participants and not objects therefore, I have rejected objectivism because I do not have a positivist orientation with regards to reality as being 'out there' in the world and needing to be discovered using conventional scientific methodologies. I regard myself as a significant actor in my research as I am a practicing special school headteacher.

This approach can be an empowering process for the participant as the participant can be seen as the writers of their own history. Making meaning of their own reality and appreciating their own construction of knowledge through practice. This process can be seen as enabling and empowering to enable participants to freely express their views, which they may not have chance to do with someone outside of the school system. (Cohen, Marion & Morrison 2000).

A subjectivist ontology will be adopted throughout this thesis. This ontological stance perceives the social world as "being constructed by individuals and groups, and hence is the result of experience and thought which is shared through language" (Wood & Smith, 2016, p. 60). Accordingly, social reality is

thought of as being designed via our perspectives, sense-making and lived experiences. It is based on the multiple and idiosyncratic perceptions of the individual. As noted above, a researcher's ontological assumptions are philosophically linked to their theory of knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Madill et al. (2000) outline a variety of epistemological stances ranging from naïve realism – the belief that there are truths about the world in which we live and it is therefore "largely knowable" (p. 3) – to radical constructionism, a perspective that questions the extent to which there can be "any absolute foundations for knowledge" or any language capable of representing reality (p. 12). In the midst of these two extremes lies contextual constructionism, and it is this epistemological position that I adopt throughout my IPA study. Crotty (1998) defines constructionism as:

> The view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (p. 42).

Contextual constructionism, a branch of constructionism, suggests that "human acts or 'events' are active, dynamic and developmental moments of a continuously changing reality" (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988, p. 65). Consequently, the researcher and the participant are perceived to be situated within a particular cultural and social context while constructing and interpreting knowledge (Madill et al., 2000). Those who adopt this epistemological stance acknowledge that researchers' multiple lenses (e.g. professional, social) influence their research (p. 1). The data collected, the analytic process as well as the meaning ascribed to data is therefore perceived to be context-dependent. Those who adopt this epistemology assert that the findings of any research inquiry will vary according to the circumstances in which it was conducted (Madill et al., 2000).

IPA is a qualitative methodology which aims "to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). It is concerned with the life project of the individual, his or her lived experiences and the particularity of their personal perceptions.

IPA researchers seek to gain an "understanding of a person's relatedness to the world (and to the things in it which matter to them) through the meanings that they make" (Larkin & Thompson, 2011, p. 102). They are interested in individual's situated experiences of living, and the ways in which they interact and negotiate within the social, cultural and historical contexts in which they find themselves.

While IPA researchers tend to adopt an epistemological position somewhere between critical realism (which "admits an inherent subjectivity in the production of knowledge" (Madill et al., 2000, p. 3)) and constructionism, Lyons (2007) argues that a contextual constructionist epistemology is particularly compatible with the concerns of IPA (p. 161). Researchers adopting IPA are committed to "exploring, describing, interpreting and situating the means by which our participants make sense of their experiences" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 110). Inspired by the work of Heidegger (1962/1967), IPA researchers are concerned with the person-in-context (Larkin et al., 2006), the individual whose experiences, views and sense-making are framed and shaped by the contexts in which they are situated and required to negotiate. This perspective complements the epistemological stance of contextual constructionism. Furthermore, an IPA study perceives individuals, both participants and researchers, to be "sense-making creatures" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33). The notion of 'sense-making' implies an activity which is idiosyncratic, active and ongoing. This is an idea that is reminiscent of the assumptions of contextual constructionism explored above. Those adopting this epistemological stance contend that "all accounts are imbued with subjectivity" (Madill et al., 2000, p. 17) and "regard absolute truth or knowledge as an ideal that cannot be realised" (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988, p. 67). In light of its compatibility with IPA, the epistemological position of contextual constructionism underpins this study.

Phenomenology

IPA is a research methodology based on phenomenology: a branch of philosophical thought concerned with the examination of experience. Those working in a phenomenological paradigm are concerned with what it means

to be human, the "things which matter to us and which constitute our lived world" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). Phenomenologists study "taken-for-granted, everyday examples of the lived world, making explicit the meanings we attach to our human experience" (Finlay, 2011, p. 6), as well as our interactions with the world in particular times and spaces. Those taking a phenomenological perspective are concerned with our perceptions of the world and the ways in which a given phenomenon "appears in our consciousness" (Willig, 2008, p. 52). Phenomenologists are not concerned with producing objective truths about life and events. Instead, they seek to unearth subjective perceptions and points of view (Smith et al., 1999, p. 218).

Phenomenological philosophy originated with the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). As Finlay (2011) notes, Husserl aimed to create a new type of science that was concerned with "the description and structural analysis of consciousness as it is given in experience" (p. 44). He argued that we should 'go back to the things themselves', back to our raw, pre-reflexive consciousness and the particular objects of our experience (Smith et al., 2009). Intentionality is a key component of Husserlian phenomenology. The term refers to the idea that our conscious awareness is always directed at some thing or object. Moran (2000) describes intentionality as 'aboutness' in that "every act of loving is a loving *of* something, every act of seeing is a seeing *of* something" (p. 16). The idea of the intentional consciousness sought to "transform the distinction between subjects and objects into a correlation between what is experienced (the noema) and the way it is experienced (the noesis)" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 15).

In the context of my research, my participants' day-to-day experience as a special school headteacher is the noema, whereas the ways in which these experiences are interpreted or perceived is the noesis. The correlation between the experience of 'doing special school headship' and individual's perceptions of this experience is characterised as intentionality (Langdridge, 2007).

Alongside Heidegger's reading of phenomenology, the work of existential

phenomenologists Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) adds to the phenomenological theory underpinning IPA. Merleau-Ponty was concerned with the person "as a *body-subject*, with consciousness embedded in the body" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 37). He focused on our embodied relationship with the world in which we live. For IPA researchers, Merleau-Ponty's work highlights the ways in which the "body shapes the fundamental character of our knowing about the world" Smith et al., (2009, p. 19). It adds to the phenomenological image of the individual as situated and contextualised.

Merleau-Ponty's work relates to my study on the stories of special school headteachers' experience of headship past, present and future, through the embodied performances the women reported requiring to enact as special school headteachers in the professional arena. Sartre also contributed to the view of the immersed individual. He posited that 'life projects' guide individual's existence and that these represent "our fundamental way of seeing ourselves" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 35). A person's 'life project' is said to be ongoing and therefore we, as individuals, are argued to be constantly in the process of creating or 'becoming'. According to Smith et al. (2009), Sartre's work shows "a penetrating analysis of people engaged in projects in the world and the embodied, interpersonal, affective and moral nature of those encounters" (p. 21). Viewing my study through the lens of Sartre's work, it is possible to perceive my participants' special school headship experience as ongoing projects guiding both their decision-making and the ways in which they sees themselves.

The brief exploration of the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre presented above highlights phenomenologists' concern with the lifeworld of the individual (i.e. "the world as concretely lived" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 39)) as well as the relatedness and contextualised nature of human existence. For IPA researchers, the phenomenological study of participants' lived experiences is an *interpretative* enterprise which focuses on individual's "attempts to make meanings out of their activities and to the things happening to them" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21). IPA, therefore, is informed by

both the study of phenomenology *and* hermeneutics. It is to an exploration of hermeneutic philosophy that this chapter now turns.

Hermeneutics

In conjunction with phenomenology, IPA is underpinned by the philosophical study of hermeneutics: the theory of interpretation. Hermeneutics began as the "science of biblical interpretation" (Crotty, 1998, p. 87) and was later expanded to incorporate a much wider variety of texts, including interview transcripts and data (Smith, 2007). IPA researchers draw on the work of three hermeneutic theorists: Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer (Smith et al., 2009).

German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) "was one of the first to write systematically about hermeneutics as a generic form" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 22). Perceiving texts to be defined both by the writer's language and his or her individual perspective, he proposed that textual interpretation required both 'grammatical' and 'psychological' insight (Smith, 2007, pp. 4-5). For Schleiermacher, a significant part of the hermeneutic process "involved putting oneself in the mind of the other, sympathetically trying to get inside the original lived experience" of the author (Moran, 2000, p. 275). Smith et al. (2009) argue that Schleiermacher's thinking is pertinent to the IPA researcher as the analytic process he/she engages in is "geared to learning both about the person providing the account and the subject matter of that account" (p. 37). Interestingly, a more contemporary philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer (explored below), was sceptical of Schleiermacher's 'psychologising' (Smith, 2007, p. 4) and argued that when reading a text (or, in the context of my study, an interview transcript) "we are trying to make sense of the text rather than the author" or research participant (Smith et al., 2009, p. 37). Prominent IPA researchers however have questioned these criticisms and stressed the relevance of Schleiermacher's insights (p. 37).

Despite phenomenology and hermeneutics being distinct branches of interpretivist thought, Heidegger "presented hermeneutics as a prerequisite to phenomenology" (Shinebourne, 2011b, pp. 46–7). He brought the two

philosophical studies together by arguing that "all our experience is interpreting and encountering what has already been interpreted by ourselves and by others" (Moran, 2000, p. 235). This interpretative stance is particularly apparent in the text *Being and Time* where Heidegger advanced a hermeneutic phenomenology in which "the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 61). Through a Heideggerian lens, the phenomenological project is the study of "how things appear or are covered up" (Moran, 2000, p. 229).

Drawing on Heidegger's work, the IPA researcher "is concerned with examining how a phenomenon appears, and the analyst is implicated in facilitating and making sense of this appearance" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). Researchers employing IPA draw on Heidegger's work and therefore perceive an interrelationship between the studies of hermeneutics and phenomenology; they believe that just as "phenomenological analysis produced by the researcher is always an interpretation of the participant's experience" (Willig, 2008, p. 56-7), our interpretations are always grounded in our lived experiences of the world. This is a realisation that highlights the importance of researcher reflexivity, a topic I explore later on in this chapter.

Alongside Schleiermacher and Heidegger, IPA researchers draw on the hermeneutic phenomenology of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). Gadamer, like Heidegger, emphasised the historical, emergent and cultural situatedness of understanding. Focusing on the contextually bound nature of our perceptions, Gadamer introduced the idea of the 'horizon'. He wrote that a "horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 269). This is the idea that "we each have our own presuppositions, beliefs, predilections and these make up our own horizon (or sphere) of understanding" (Shaw, 2010, p. 235). He posited that language is an integral part of understanding the world in which we live, and that understanding between people is possible "through the fusions of horizons, where we acknowledge consensus in our particular worldviews" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 43). Gadamer's insights regarding the historically contingent nature of our understanding and the partiality of one's

horizon are borne in mind by those conducting IPA studies.

Jonathan Smith (2011a) observes:

> Experience cannot be plucked straightforwardly from the heads of participants, it requires a process of engagement and interpretation on the part of the researcher and this ties IPA to a hermeneutic perspective (p. 10).

Recognising that we, as researchers, cannot access 'pure' experience or understanding, IPA researchers endeavour to do research which is 'experience close' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33). They aim to examine the ways in which participants make sense of their experiences and the meanings they attribute to them while acknowledging the impossibility of accessing participants' personal worlds directly or completely (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, p. 264). Researchers employing IPA are therefore said to be engaged in a 'double hermeneutic' i.e. when analysing participants' perceptions the researcher is aiming to make "sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). The concept of the 'double hermeneutic' (found in Figure 9) highlights the idea that IPA "always involves researchers' own interpretations as they try to make sense of what is being said while remaining grounded in the interview text" (Finlay, 2011, p. 141).

This has influenced my research design and approach to analysis as an insider and using the method of unstructured interviews and by interacting with the participants I would be able to perceive themes, feelings, ideas, thoughts and actions as heard or observed which would enable me to see emergent patterns during analysis and therefore a more controlled and workable methodology for myself as a relatively novice researcher.

Reflexivity and insider perspective

I have raised my awareness as a researcher when reading the 'interview text' of the importance of becoming reflexive in the interpretation of the special school headteachers' leadership experiences. It is crucial that I take

a reflexive approach to provide a credible and plausible explanation of the participants' accounts to enable me to avoid assumptions. This is essential as an insider and a special school headteacher myself. The process of reflexivity will increase my understanding and allow for a more rigorous approach to my research on special school headteachers' experience of headship.

Figure 9: *The double hermeneutic*

| The researcher | Endeavouring to Make sense of | The participant | Endeavouring to Make Sense of | Their lived experience |
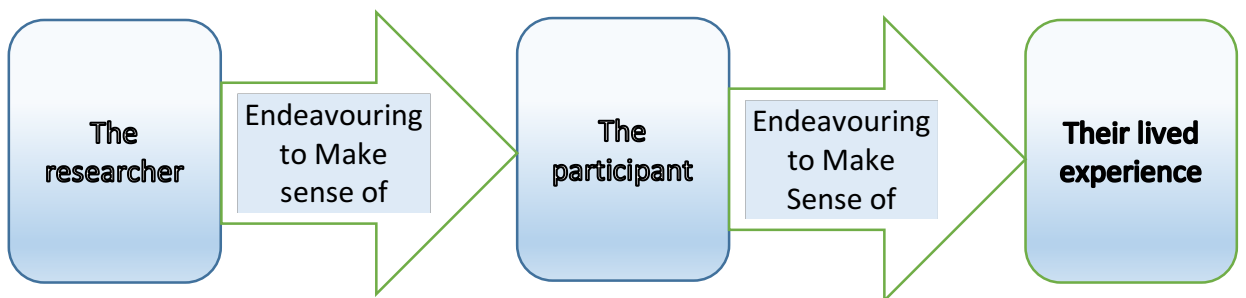
The lived researcher participation

A central idea in the IPA literature is the notion of the hermeneutic circle. This idea emphasises the iterative nature of IPA i.e. the idea that IPA researchers "move back and forth through a range of different ways of thinking about the data, rather than completing each step, one after the other" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). It also illuminates the non-linear relationship that exists between parts of a text (or the interview transcript) and its entirety. Smith et al. (2009) observe that "the part and the whole can thus be understood to describe a number of relationships" (p. 28).

Figure 10: *The hermeneutic circle*

The part		The whole
The single word		The sentence
The single extract		The complete text
The particular text		The complete oeuvre
The interview		The research project
The single episode		The complete life
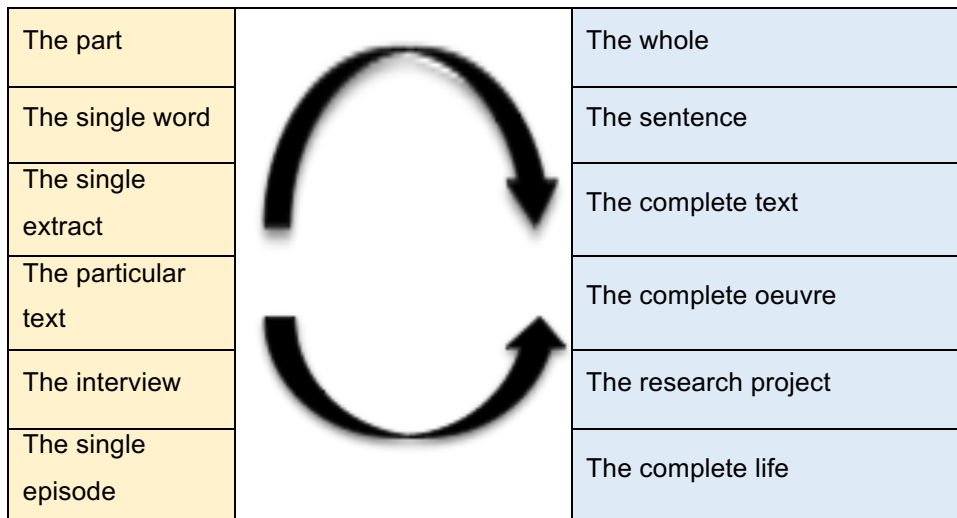
Source: Smith et al., 2009, p. 28

Smith (2007) observes that another important hermeneutic circle in IPA "describes the relationship between the interpreter and that object of interpretation" (p. 5). This hermeneutic circle began, in my case, with my existing understanding and beliefs about women leaders and their careers. Finlay (2011) describes such assumptions as "a rough and ready approximation" influenced by prior experiences, perceptions and judgements (p. 53). Acknowledging these fore-understandings and trying to remain as open as possible to the data, I moved around the hermeneutic circle as I encountered participants' narratives i.e. 'the object of interpretation'. As Smith (2007, p. 6) argues, this challenged and irretrievably changed my fore-understandings. The cycle carried on as I repeatedly listened to the interview interaction, asked questions and tried to make sense of it *(*p. 6). My understanding of the individual participant's sense-making deepened "by going round the circle again and again" (Finlay, 2011, p. 53).

IPA: An idiographic approach

Idiography is the third theoretical perspective underpinning IPA research (Shinebourne, 2011a, p. 22). An idiographic approach focuses on the idiosyncratic and particular facets of individual's lives and experiences. This view of social research is antithetical to the nomothetic approach taken by

those with a more positivist epistemological stance. Nomothetic research is "characterised by procedures and methods designed to discover general laws" in an "absolutist, external reality" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 6). Those conducting an IPA study, on the other hand, demonstrate a commitment to the idiographic by aiming to do justice to the complexity and idiosyncratic nature of human experience. IPA researchers' idiographic commitment is evident on two levels. Firstly, the IPA researcher aims to understand "experiential phenomena from the perspective of particular individuals in particular contexts" (Finlay, 2011, p. 141). IPA's primary concern is with the particular and specific nuances of lived experience. Secondly, the analytic procedure employed in an IPA study "always begins with the detailed reading of the single case" i.e. the lived experiences of one individual (Smith & Eatough, 2007, pp. 37–8). The process aims to facilitate an in-depth and insightful analysis of an individual's narrative. Only when a thorough, nuanced understanding of a single case is achieved does the researcher move on to consider another case.

Methodology

Having outlined the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, the next section of this chapter focuses specifically on IPA as my chosen methodology, and its strengths and limitations in my context.

The methodology has been used in the study of education, given the interdisciplinary nature of educational research (van Manen, 1990; Biesta, 2011), this is perhaps not surprising. I found that IPA is not, at the time of writing, commonly used by those studying gender and educational leadership. It is anticipated therefore that this thesis will make a methodological contribution to existing literature in the field. The idiographic nature of IPA has the potential to generate new insights into the stories, experiences and professional aspirations of women special school headteachers. IPA could also add to the range of methodologies used to research gender and educational leadership.

Rationale for selecting IPA

IPA was selected as an appropriate methodology based on four factors and elements of testing the pilot. Firstly, my research questions share IPA's concern with particularity; they hone in on the individual special school headteacher stories of headship as opposed to a statistically generalisable group. Given its idiographic nature, IPA was considered to be capable of highlighting the individual, their subjective sense-making, their lived experiences and perceptions. Secondly, IPA views participants as 'experiential experts' on the subject under investigation (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This seemed particularly suited to the study of women special school headteachers who, as stated in the previous chapter, are rarely the subject of inquiry. An appropriate methodological approach was considered to be one that had the capacity to illuminate the issues around gender and career advancement as my participants perceived them. It was believed that IPA and its focus on the 'participant as expert' would generate rich, nuanced insights into the experiences of an under-researched group.

Thirdly, I felt that the approach allowed for careful consideration of the contexts and spaces in which my participants found themselves. As Smith et al. (2009) remark "sometimes the very choice of IPA as a methodology, the rationale for its adoption, will be centred on the perceived need for sensitivity to context through close engagement with the idiographic and the particular" (p.180). I felt, therefore, that an IPA approach to research would illuminate individual's relatedness to the personal and professional worlds they found themselves within. Finally, IPA was considered to be consistent with my epistemological stance and my belief that one cannot abandon one's subjectivity, preconceptions and experiences to conduct research as a feminist. This is the view that "we cannot escape interpretation at any stage, but we can reflect upon our role in producing these interpretations, and we can maintain a commitment to grounding them in our participants' views" (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p. 103).

Overall, then, I believed IPA to be an appropriate methodological approach with the capacity to offer an open and exploratory lens through which to view

women special school headteachers' stories and the ways in which they perceive and make sense of their experience past, present and future.

In the initial phase of the research design process, other qualitative methodologies were considered. The pilot project gave an opportunity to consider Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) notion of temporality and temporal space, I have rejected this method for a more in-depth interpretive method. Both descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology were investigated due to their emphasis on individual's lived experiences. Descriptive phenomenology (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008) was rejected on the grounds that I found its concern with the phenomenological reduction and therefore its lack of an interpretative focus to be incompatible with my beliefs about the role of the researcher and the co-constructed nature of knowledge in social research (Kvale, 2007). I also rejected hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990). Comparing IPA to modes of hermeneutic phenomenology, I found IPA to be a more 'structured version of hermeneutic phenomenology' as an insider using the method of unstructured interviews and by interacting with the participants I would be able to perceive themes, feelings, ideas, thoughts and actions as heard or observed which would enable me to see emergent patterns during analysis and therefore a more controlled and workable methodology for myself as a relatively novice researcher (Finlay, 2011, p. 90). IPA enabled me to be rigorous and systematic in the process of collecting, organising and analysing my data, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Discourse analysis was considered as it would facilitate an examination into how individual participants present and construct their special school stories via language. My research questions however focus on the ways in which participants make sense of and perceive their lived experiences. Smith (2011a) suggests that such a focus is more suited to an IPA approach than one that employs discourse analysis. He states that the fundamental difference between the two is that while both focus on linguistics to varying degrees, "IPA researchers talk to participants and analyse what they say in order to try to learn about how they are *making sense* of their experience,

discourse analysts examine what participants say in order to learn about how they are *constructing accounts* of experience" (Smith, 2011a, p. 10). Given that meaning-making and perceptions are very much the focus of this project, I made the decision to reject discourse analysis as a possible methodology.

The limitations of IPA

As Willig (2008) observes, like all research methodologies, IPA "suffers from several conceptual and practical limitations" (p. 66). Firstly, IPA "believes in a chain of connection between embodied experience, talk about that experience and a participant making sense of, and emotional reaction to, that experience" (Smith, 2011, p. 10). It suggests that the ways in which we talk about our life events, perceptions and sense-making are capable of reflecting and doing justice to the experiences themselves. The role of language in IPA has been subject to criticism by those who believe that "language constructs, rather than describes reality" (Willig, 2008, p. 66). It is argued that participants' narrative accounts are not simply reflections of lived experiences but rather versions of experience created via language. I would contend, however, that the purpose of an IPA study such as the one that will be presented in this thesis is to explore the sense that participants are making of their own lives and realities as opposed to uncovering 'truths' about a singular reality.

Secondly, descriptive phenomenologist Giorgi (2010) argues that there are "no instructions concerning how to make careful descriptions, no hermeneutic principles to follow, no comments about a perspective to be assumed" in IPA (p. 10). The accusation that there is a lack of 'method' in this approach is addressed throughout the IPA literature. Smith (2011), for instance, highlights the advantages of having a set of flexible 'guidelines' or 'steps' instead of rigid 'prescriptions'. It is argued that "once one has mastered those steps and seen the finished product, one is more-able to recognise that IPA is an approach and sensibility, as much a way of thinking about and seeing, as of doing something" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 81).

Thirdly, some scholars have questioned IPA's use of the term 'cognition', arguing that phenomenology is "not concerned with understanding cognition, looking inside people to try to understand what is going on in their heads" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 13). For Willig (2008), IPA can be critiqued on the grounds that it uses the term 'cognition' to "refer to the subjective quality of experience" (p. 69). Eatough and Smith (2008) however counter this criticism by arguing that those utilising IPA believe "cognitions are not separate functions but an aspect of being-in-the-world" or our human existence (p. 183).

Finally, a further potential criticism of IPA is its use of small sample sizes. By concerning themselves solely with the idiosyncratic, IPA researchers risk being accused of presenting non-representative, atypical cases which tell the reader very little about the universal experience of the phenomenon under investigation. In response to such criticisms, however, Smith and Eatough (2007) argue that larger sample sizes in IPA would lead the analyst into a "trap of being swamped with data and only producing a superficial qualitative analysis" (p. 39). Furthermore, Smith et al. (2009) state that:

> Delving deeper into the particular also takes us closer to the universal. We are thus better positioned to think about how we and other people might deal with the particular situation being explored, how at the deepest level we share a great deal with a person whose personal circumstances may, at face value, seem entirely separate from our own. Thus in some ways the detail of the individual also brings us closer to significant aspects of the general (pp. 31–32).

To summarise, I aimed to conduct an in-depth investigation into how individual women special school headteachers make sense of their headship experience. With this aim in mind and having considered other viable alternatives, I concluded that IPA was a suitable methodology for this study.

The following section will discuss the specificities of data collection and data analysis.

Design for data collection

Having discussed IPA, its advantages and limitations, I will now move on to explore the data collection method employed in this research. A qualitative, unstructured approach to interviewing will be taken to gain detailed insights into six women special school headteachers' experience past, present and future. Qualitative interviewing has a number of advantages for the IPA researcher and also fits into my methodological framework. Firstly, in-depth interviews allow researchers to capture the complexities of participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to the phenomenon of study (Englander, 2012; Kvale, 2007). Secondly, in comparison to more structured approaches to data collection, qualitative interviews are more likely to give participants the space and freedom to express "their own perspectives in their own words" (Kvale, 2007, p. 11). This, in turn, is said to generate "fairer and fuller" representations of participants' views (Mason, 2002, p. 66).

Thirdly, qualitative interviewing is compatible with the methodological assumption that "all social knowledge is generated as a part and a product of human social experience" (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 192). As opposed to 'neutral' collectors of data who are capable of achieving a 'God's eye view', qualitative interviewers perceive themselves to be "active and reflexive in the process of data generation" (Mason, 2002, p. 66). Finally, qualitative interviewing produces rich, detailed and more nuanced data than would be generated by those taking a more quantitative approach to data collection. The in-depth qualitative interview facilitates a deeper form of analysis in which kaleidoscopic selves, perspectives and interpretations emerge. Those who choose to conduct qualitative interviews believe that "people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality" they aim to investigate (Mason, 2002, p. 63). This belief has numerous implications for the ways in which qualitative interviewers perceive the researcher–participant relationship.

Kvale (2007) illustrates two metaphors of the interviewer: the miner and the traveller. The 'miner' is an interviewer who perceives the research participant

to be a receptacle of hidden knowledge. Within this metaphor, the interviewer is tasked with excavating the precious metal of participant experience without contaminating the phenomenon under investigation (p. 19). The researcher-participant relationship implied within this metaphor appears to be both sterile and instrumental. The metaphor of the interviewer as traveller, on the other hand, perceives the social researcher to be in the midst of a nomadic voyage of knowledge construction and discovery:

> The interview traveller, in line with the original Latin meaning of conversation as 'wandering together with', walks along with the local inhabitants, asks questions and encourages them to tell their own stories of their lived world (Kvale, 2007, p. 19).

In comparison to the miner metaphor, the researcher-participant relationship presented here appears to be more collaborative and relational. The qualitative research interview is perceived to be a "construction site for knowledge" (Kvale, 2007, p. 7). The study reported on in this thesis was designed with the metaphor of the interviewer as a traveller in mind. It aimed to foster collaborative research relationships which acknowledged the 'experiential expertise' (Smith & Eatough, 2007) of my participants. I endeavoured to design a research process which would allow individuals the freedom to explore their lived experiences while reflexively acknowledging the presence of the researcher. I have chosen to use the unstructured interview process for this purpose.

IPA is compatible with data collection methods which "invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 56). It is for this reason that in-depth, unstructured interviewing is a well-established and commonly used approach to data collection in IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, 2011a). To define what I mean by an unstructured interview, this thesis uses the definition suggested by Kvale (2007) who saw it as "a planned and flexible interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 149). It is an interviewing technique that requires the researcher to manage a delicate

balancing act between "guiding and being led" by the participant and their concerns (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011).

I chose unstructured interviewing over any other type of qualitative interview. Unstructured interviews give "the researcher and respondent much more flexibility than the more conventional structured interview, questionnaire or survey" (Smith, 1995, p. 10). The interviewer is therefore less constrained by the interview schedule than in more structured techniques and able to co-construct participants' responses to uncover richer data *(*p.12). Secondly, although the researcher in an unstructured interview is guided by a prearranged series of open questions, there is a certain freedom within the interview interaction to "follow the respondent's interests or concerns" (p. 12). This freedom grants the researcher access to the "psychological and social world of the participant as far as is possible" (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p. 42).

With these advantages in mind, it was decided that a qualitative, unstructured approach to interviewing was the most suitable data collection method for this study. Having defined what is meant by an unstructured interview and outlined some of its advantages, I will now move on to discuss the design and development of the interviews that I conducted with the participants.

Developing and piloting the interview schedule

The development and implementation of the pilot interview informed my decision to use IPA as an analysis tool. The semi-structured interview is popular with qualitative researchers and the findings from my pilot interview enabled me to reflect on the depth of interview which did have its limitations. On reflection this gave me the clarity to explore the use of unstructured interviews for listening to my participants' special school headteacher stories for my main doctorate study because this is an area of research that has not been explored previously and will contribute to new knowledge in special educational leadership.

The semi-structured interview schedule used during my pilot interview was developed and aimed to explore the career trajectory of one woman

headteacher. The exact nature of the schedule was informed by existing literature on women and educational leadership, and discussions with my supervisor. While creating the schedule, I followed the guidelines outlined by Smith et al. (2009) on schedule development. These guidelines highlight the importance of open, expansive questions which "do not make too many assumptions about the participant's experiences or concerns, or lead them towards particular answers" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 60). The semi-structured questions included in my schedule focused on the past, the present and the future and were carefully constructed giving the participant enough flexibility to also be open ended with their answers. They aimed to explore individual's career trajectory to date, their present-day life as a headteacher as well as their professional aspirations. The semi-structured interview schedule used in this study (Appendix 6) was developed with the intention of encouraging participants to explore their careers and subjective experiences in detail to enable their story telling.

I piloted my interview schedule with a woman headteacher participant, in February 2017 (for participant findings see Appendix 7). While planning, conducting and evaluating my pilot study, I aimed to develop and test the suitability of my interview schedule and sampling strategy, enhance my interviewing skills and acquaint myself with the recording equipment I intended to use. Although the data collected during the pilot interview has not been incorporated into the findings presented in this thesis, the chance to conduct a pilot study was a valuable opportunity. It helped me to reflect on my positionality as a researcher as well as my research design, sample population and interviewing technique. These reflections are reproduced in Appendix 7. Following the pilot study, I felt able to make meaningful changes to and develop my interview schedule in accordance with my experience of interviewing the participant that took part. I added in questions and made revisions to enhance the clarity and scope of the schedule.

A final version of my unstructured interview schedule used in this project can be found in Appendix 8. I chose the unstructured interview questions and probing questions to give the participate the opportunity to talk freely about

their individual experiences of special school headship. It must be noted however, that while designing my final interview schedule I feared that I would not have enough probing sensitive questions and, as a result, my interviews would be too short and shallow. During the interviews themselves, however, I found that the participants set the agenda and determined the important issues that were being discussed. As a researcher, I went in with an open mind (Thomas, 2013). During the interview process the participants led the way for telling their own individual story, the probing I engaged in throughout the interviews encouraged rich, lengthy responses. In hindsight, I believe that the unstructured questions were sufficient, the sensitive probes helped to determine "What happened next" (Thomas, 2013, p. 46).

While designing my research project, I aimed to make the data collection process as convenient and accessible for my participants as possible. Having worked as a teacher, I am fully aware of the limited amount of time that those working in schools have outside of their day-to-day timetables and responsibilities. I recognised, therefore, that I would need to be as flexible and accommodating of participant's schedules and availability as possible. With this in mind, I decided to give participants the option of having a face-to-face or telephone interview. Incorporating this choice into my research design required careful consideration of the strengths and limitations of both modes of interviewing.

Sampling

Having discussed the stages involved in developing an unstructured interview schedule, I will now move on to examine the issue of sampling in my IPA research methodology. IPA is concerned with quality and depth as opposed to quantity and breadth (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Challenging "the traditional linear relationship between 'number of participants' and value of research", IPA studies focus on a small sample of individuals (Reid et al., 2005, p. 22). It was decided during the design phase of my project that the rich, nuanced insights gained from unstructured interviews with six special school headteacher participants would generate enough data to facilitate a detailed and interpretative case-

by-case analysis. I chose a sample size of six to allow for both an in-depth examination of individual headteachers' accounts, and a detailed consideration of the convergences and divergences that exist between participants. It also meant that if individual women dropped out of the study I would still have enough participants to facilitate a detailed analysis. In addition to small sample sizes, IPA researchers endeavour to recruit "a fairly homogeneous sample" who will find the topic under investigation meaningful (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49). My research questions are concerned with women special school headteachers' experience of special school headship past, present and future. I am interested in the ways in which women headteachers make sense of the special school headteacher role. The participant inclusion criteria I used, therefore, meant that my participants needed to be women who were working as headteachers or heads of school in state or academy special schools in England at the time of interview. Consistent with IPA's commitment to the idiographic, it was anticipated that this inclusion criteria, would generate a homogeneous sample who could give a particular, contextualised perspective on special school headship.

I chose to focus my research on the lived experiences and headship experience of six women, a group of special school headteachers. Existing research in this area suggests that women teachers experience their careers differently to their male colleagues (for example, Coleman, 2002). It also suggests that men are more likely to achieve headteacher status than women (DfE, 2015a). My decision to focus on a female only sample is not unique in the field of gender and educational leadership (see, for example, Smith, 2011a; Shah, 2015). Yet, I feel it is necessary to point out that this study was not designed with the intention of excluding or undermining the lived experiences and perspectives of male special school headteachers. Indeed, given the over-representation of men in secondary headship (DfE, 2015a), an interesting future study may be one that explores the ways in which male deputies experience their careers and make sense of the special school leadership role.

In order to recruit a small, homogeneous sample, a snowball sampling

strategy was used. This is a non-probability sampling technique whereby "researchers identify a small number of individuals who have the characteristics in which they are interested. These people are then used as informants to identify, or put researchers in touch with, others who qualify for inclusion and these, in turn, identify yet others" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 158). This process is repetitive and accumulative, hence the metaphor of the evolving 'snowball' (Noy, 2008). Researchers' reliance on referral by their participants is a commonly used approach for those employing IPA (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49).

Snowball sampling is claimed to be a good technique for gaining access to populations that are hard to access, those "not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies" (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 54). It became clear that I required a sampling strategy that would allow me to draw on the referrals of participants. Snowball sampling offered a way forward.

Throughout the research process, I became very conscious of the asymmetrical power relations that could exist between myself (as a current experienced special school headteacher) and my participants (as serving headteachers at different stages of their headship in the special school sector). When designing my project, I wanted to employ a sampling strategy that would help me to minimise the possibility of hierarchical research relationships. I felt that utilising existing social networks via participant referrals would help me to do this. The social nature of snowball sampling, Cohen et al. (2011) argue, has the capacity to "reduce, even dissolve, asymmetrical power relations between researcher and participants, as the contacts might be built on friendships, peer group membership and personal contacts and because participants can act as gatekeepers to other participants, and informants exercise control over whom else to involve and refer" (p. 159). The researcher-participant relationship in this study alongside my positionality as a researcher is discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

Snowball sampling, like all other sampling strategies, has limitations. The initial contact used by the researcher has the capacity to 'bias' the sample.

Indeed, the first participant interviewed leads the researcher to subsequent contacts and this in turn can lead to "sampling or oversampling of co-operative groups or individuals" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 159). Diversity in terms of background and viewpoint may therefore be limited. This strategy may also exclude certain groups and individuals, those that are entirely dissimilar to the original point of contact or not in professional networks/ friendship groups for instance. Snowball sampling, therefore, "can be seen as a biased sampling technique because it is not random and it selects individuals on the basis of social networks" (Browne, 2005, p. 51). This accusation of bias appears to be linked to the belief that social research should strive for 'representativeness' and produce findings that are statistically generalisable. Given the size of my sample, these aims can never be realised nor are they intended. This project has been designed with the aim of shedding light on women teachers' career experiences and aspirations. I anticipate that my findings therefore will have some degree of "theoretical transferability" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 38). It is however essential that, as a reflexive researcher, I am aware of the limitations of the sampling strategy I intend to employ. Browne (2005) reminds us that no sampling technique is flawless, "rather advantages and disadvantages are subjective and often based on research precepts of what is right and wrong" (p. 57).

Having explored the sampling strategy used in this investigation, I will now move on to introduce the demographic characteristics of my participants. A full exploration of participants' stories of special school headteacher experience of headship past, present and future can be found further in this chapter.

Participants' demographic characteristics

In-depth, unstructured interviews were conducted with six women special school headteachers between September 2018 and January 2019. None of the participants opted for a telephone interview. The participants who took part in this study were aged between forty-two and sixty-four at the time of interview. All of the participants held special school headteacher or head of school positions in either academy or local authority special schools in

England, covering both urban and rural areas. A table of participant characteristics is presented in Table 4 below. In order to protect participants' anonymity, pseudonyms have been used.

Limitations

A significant limitation of this study is that my sample consists entirely of white women. While the idiographic nature of this research project means that any conclusions that I arrive at will be tentative and unable to be generalised, I am very conscious that the views of white women cannot be taken to be representative of *all* women (Crenshaw, 2010). I do not want to generalise and IPA is a methodology that focuses on the particular and in this study the stories of female special school headteachers.

Table 4: *Participant demographics*

Name	Age Range	Location	Children	School Type	Headteacher/Head of School Experience
Gay	64	West Yorkshire	Yes	Academy	25 years Headteacher and CEO of a special school for Cognition and learning
Carmel	56	South Yorkshire	Yes	State school	4 Years Head of school at an outstanding special school for Cognition and Learning
Jo	48	Midlands	Yes	State School	2 Years Headteacher of Cognition and Learning Primary school
Rachel	42	South Yorkshire	Yes	Academy	2.5 years Headteacher of a through special school for pupils with Autistic Conditions
Sally	45	South Yorkshire	Yes	State School	5 years Second Headship and leads a secondary special school for pupils with Autistic Conditions
Amy	55	West Yorkshire	Yes	Academy	4 Years Headteacher of a multicultural special school for Autism & MLD

The interview procedure

Before proceeding to examine the reflexive stance taken during this research project, it is necessary to present a transparent account of the steps taken to both collect and analyse my data. What follows is a step-by-step explanation of the research process.

Following ethical approval, I sent potential participants an invitation to be involved in the project (see Appendix 9). I initially used school websites to identify special schools in England with women headteachers and deputies. After this process, I relied on a snowball sampling strategy (outlined above). Once a participant confirmed she would like to be involved in the project, we arranged a suitable time and place in which the interview would occur. It was at this stage that participants could opt for either a face-to-face interview or telephone interview depending on their preference and availability.

Before starting the interview, participants received a participant information sheet (Appendix 9) and were given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. Participants were made aware that their participation in the project was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. Full, informed consent was obtained and participants were asked to sign and date a participant consent form (see Appendix 10).

Once this was complete, participants were asked unstructured interview questions (see Appendix 8). The schedule was used flexibly according to the individual participant's concerns and interests. Each interview lasted for approximately sixty minutes, and was recorded using a digital voice recorder. After the interview, I thanked participants for their involvement and asked them whether there was anything they would like to add. All of the data collected during the interviews were used and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). I later transcribed each recording, using the audio recording, I transferred the recording using Otter online, the transcript gave summary keywords and timings of the conversation which I found helpful.

The analytic process

IPA is an iterative and creative process which involves exploring, commenting on and interpreting an individual case in detail. By clustering initial themes together, superordinate (main) and subordinate (secondary) themes are developed from each transcript and, later, the data set as a whole. During the data analysis phase of this project, I followed the guidelines set out by IPA researchers Smith et al. (2009). The stages involved in this process (including signposts to illustrative examples from my analysis) are presented below. Smith and colleagues (2009) advise "the novice embarking on an IPA study for the first time to begin by working closely with the suggested set of steps" (p. 81). As a first time IPA researcher, I adhered to the procedure described below and found the suggested phases to be a useful scaffold. Gee (2011) observes that as researchers become more confident analysing data in this way, the steps become a 'road map' one studies "in advance to chart an overview of a planned journey and, along the way, one refers to it to check whether a part of the route already taken is leading in the right direction" (p. 21).

Step 1: Reading and re-reading

To start the IPA analytic process, I read and re-read a single interview transcript. I also listened to the audio recording of the interview to ensure that I was as familiar with the participant's narrative as possible. Following the advice of Smith et al. (2009, p. 82), I recorded my recollections of the interview interaction and any initial observations I had about the transcript into my reflective note book.

Step 2: Initial noting

The next stage of the process involved writing exploratory notes and comments on the transcript. I did consider electronic forms of coding such as Nivo, however, after receiving the Nivo training I decided a paper based approach was more effective when working through the transcripts because I was able to read carefully each line and was able to interpret the themes and by using different coloured post-it notes to denote the emerging themes

under specific headings. Initial notes were recorded in the right hand margin of the transcript (see Appendix 12) under the heading 'exploratory coding'. There were three stages to this process. The first stage involved noting down *descriptive comments* (for an example, see the red ink in Appendix 12). Here I wrote down key words or phrases to describe the content of the transcript.

The questions asked of the data at this stage can be found in Appendix 11. I did this for the entire transcript before adding linguistic comments to the transcript. Examples can be found in green ink in Appendix 12. Linguistic comments focus on the way language is used by the participant. I noted down the rhythm, tone and linguistic devices used by the participant as well as any interesting words or phrases. Questions asked of the data at this stage of the process can be found in Appendix 11. Once again, I did this for the entire transcript before moving on. The final comments to be added to the right hand side of the transcript were conceptual comments (see blue ink in Appendix 12). These comments are more interpretative in nature. As Smith et al. (2009) observe "conceptual annotating will usually involve a shift in your focus towards the participant's overarching understanding of the matters that they are discussing" (p. 88). The questions asked of the data while conceptual coding can be found in Appendix 11.

Step 3: Developing emergent themes

The next stage of the IPA process involved looking for emergent themes. This was achieved by "reducing the volume of detail ... whilst maintaining complexity" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91). Here I worked with my notes instead of the transcript itself. I generated concise theme labels that captured the important details at different parts of the text. The emergent themes were recorded in black ink on the left hand side of the transcript (see Appendix 12).

Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes

Having a series of emergent themes, I then set about clustering related themes together to ascertain the superordinate (main) and subordinate (secondary) themes of the transcript. Using post-it notes, I listed all of the

emergent themes from the transcript. I then moved them around to group related themes together. I found this to be an iterative process. Following the advice of Smith et al. (2009), I used a number of techniques to do this. I used abstraction ("putting like with like" p. 96), polarisation (searching for "the oppositional relationships between emergent themes" p. 97) and numeration (assess the frequency that particular emergent themes appeared in my analysis). Having searched for connections and clustered my emergent themes, I gave each of my superordinate and subordinate themes a title. I then produced a table detailing each of the superordinate themes and subordinate themes that had emerged from my analysis. An example can be found in Appendix 14.

Step 5: Moving on to the next case

Having completed steps 1 to 4 for a single transcript, I then moved on to the next participant's transcript and repeated the process. Although IPA does lend itself to identifying emergent commonalities across the sample, the main purpose of this analytic process is to prioritise individual's experiences. I therefore treated each transcript individually and tried to 'bracket' my findings from the previous participant's analysis as far as possible (Smith et al., 2009, p. 100).

Step 6: Identifying patterns across cases

Having completed the process described above for each of the six transcripts, I set about the final part of my analysis. This involved looking for connections, convergences and divergences across all six cases. Again, I found this to be a hands-on creative process which involved using post-it notes to physically group themes together. Appendix 15 illustrates the superordinate and subordinate themes I worked with during this time. When I arrived at a set of superordinate and subordinate themes for the whole sample and had labelled them accordingly, I created a 'master table'. Given the space constraints of this thesis, this table has not been reproduced in the appendices. I have however included a condensed version in Appendix 16. (The full data can be accessed via Sheffield Hallam University Converis

system).

Having explained my approach to data collection and data analysis methods employed, I feel it is necessary to return to the subject of reflexivity in my work and explore this in more detail. In this next section, I endeavour to illustrate the reflexive stance I adopted throughout the lifecycle of this project.

The value of reflexivity

Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, Shaw (2010) notes that Gadamer's notion of horizons and Heidegger's thoughts on our being-in-the-world provide "support for adopting a reflexive attitude in experiential qualitative research" (p. 235). It has been argued, however, that while reflexivity is important it should not be the sole purpose of a qualitative research endeavour (Shaw, 2010). As Pillow (2003) warns, too much self-reflection can descend into narcissism and hence detract from our participants and the ways in which they have made sense of their lived experiences (p. 176). With this warning in mind, I have chosen to explore two of the issues that I encountered during my research project which required a great deal of reflexivity. It is to an exploration of my positionality as a researcher and the task of representing my participants' stories of special school headteachers' experience of headship past, present and future that this chapter now turns.

Researcher positionality and power dynamics

Lumby (2016) observes that "those studying gender inequality grapple with how to position themselves" (p. 37). One of the issues that I have wrestled with throughout this project is how to manage the power imbalance between myself as a researcher and my participants. I perceived this to be an important consideration as the power dynamics rooted within the qualitative research process have numerous implications, including "the effect of questions asked, and the involvement of the participants" (Ribbens, 1989, p. 581). I am a qualified secondary/special school headteacher and, before embarking upon my EdD in January 2015, I directed a Teaching School

Alliance. My participants, are also experienced special school teachers and leaders. They hold powerful positions in the institutions in which they work. Kvale (2007) argues that in any research interview there will always be a "clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject" (p. 14). He argues that the qualitative interview is a "one way" and "instrumental dialogue" in which the researcher is always more powerful than his or her participant (p. 15). The "one way" nature of the research process is evident in the power the researcher has to define the research agenda, as well as in the design and data collection phases of social research. Here educational researchers "have overarching topic control; they guide the talk, they promote it through questions, silence and response tokens and chiefly they decide which particular part of the 'answer' to follow up" (Rapley, 2001, p. 315).

Qualitative interviews, therefore, generate specific data that is later consumed, questioned and analysed by the researcher through his/her own theoretical lens. The process by which qualitative data are distilled and transformed into research reports is therefore far from neutral. In writing reports, researchers have the power to communicate another's lived experience and are given a "monopoly of interpretation" (Kvale, 2007, p. 15). Ribbens (1989) argues that in agreeing to take part in your research project, participants "put themselves very much in your hands by exposing themselves in a one-sided relationship" (p. 587).

A number of feminist writers have questioned and challenged the imbalance of power that exists between researchers and their participants. As Ribbens (1989) remarks, a number of feminist scholars have "written about their sense of oppression within the interview situation, and the dilemmas they felt this raised" (p. 581). Several solutions have been proposed in order to combat this inequity. Feminist sociologist Ann Oakley (1981) for example states "the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (p. 41). Yet the extent in which dialogic,

non-hierarchical researcher-participant relationships can ever be established in practice is highly debatable. Equally, the establishment of non-hierarchical researcher-participant relationships raises a number of ethical issues. As Cotterill (1992) remarks, "Oakley seems to overlook the moral dilemmas inherent in this practice. She does not mention how easily friendships can be manipulated to obtain source material, nor the uncomfortable fact that interviews set up in the way she describes can be distressing for the women involved" (p. 598).

Although there are certain commonalities between myself and my participants, there are many other 'intersections' or differences that could result in the establishment of hierarchical power relations. The fact that these women are not my peers is evident in their experience and status. One of the participants has more experiences and is a headteacher and CEO, another participant has less experience as a headteacher. Kvale (2007) states that "elite interviews are with persons who are leaders or experts in a community, people who are usually in powerful positions ... When an interview is established, the prevailing power asymmetry of the interview situation may be canceled out by the powerful position of the elite interviewee" (p. 70). The hierarchical nature of the relationship that I had with my participants had many implications during the data collection phase of this project. For instance, I found that the headteachers that were willing to be interviewed were very busy and only able to allocate a short amount of time to the interview process. Due to headteachers numerous responsibilities in the schools in which they work, I have also found that research interviews were prone to last minute cancellation or postponement. The power differentials between myself and my participants as well as my participants' need to manage the image of the schools they worked for meant that I was often given closed, professional answers to any question related to school life or the current educational climate. These answers tended to resemble rehearsed sound bites until probed further.

IPA researchers Smith et al. (2009) state it is important to "think about how to provide participants with access to appropriate support. If there is any

chance that the interview may be upsetting for some of your participants, then you will need to provide all of them with access to this support" (p. 54). During the design phase of this project, I gave this obligation serious consideration. Yet, given the status and age of my participants as well as the professional nature of the topics discussed, I felt it would seem patronising and inappropriate to advertise access to support. I resolved instead to have the details of a telephone counselling service on hand if required. I realised that this would require very careful handling if used and was something that I reflected on a great deal. It must be noted, however, that a situation did not arise in which I felt it necessary to issue these details. Given the dilemmas described above, it seems too simplistic and in some senses untrue to state that the power in the interviews I conducted was with me, the researcher. As Cotterill (1992) observes:

> There can be very real problems for the younger woman interviewing older women ...The older woman may set boundaries for the interview which are difficult, if not impossible, for the younger woman to attempt to cross, and thereby questions the nature of hierarchical research relationships which presume the dominant position of the researcher (p. 600).

Although I am an 'outsider' in the sense that I do not work in my participants' schools. I could also be considered an 'insider' as I have worked in educational settings and know how the system in which my participants are located works. Consequently, there was a degree of shared understandings, meanings and vocabulary among myself and my participants. According to Platt (1981), there is a risk that the data can become less rich and nuanced when "it is assumed that norms are shared" between the researcher and participant (p. 82). Reflecting on her research which involved interviewing her peers, Platt (1981) recalls "asking people about the relevance of career considerations and promotion prospects to their behaviour was awkward because of the shared norm that these things should not be too overtly pursued" (p. 77). She recalls she approached many of her questions with "length preambles and apologies" *(*p. 77). Arguably, the vocalisation of

ambition and career aspiration is not an everyday social practice in schools. These visions of future selves are rarely shared, especially with those you perceive or society dictates to be your subordinates.

The rigid binary between the 'insider' and 'outsider' researcher has been challenged by those adopting a poststructuralist lens. Thomson and Gunter (2011) remark "under the influence of postmodern literary theories some researchers suggest that we are all outsiders to each other ... and empirical research has demonstrated that insiders often have (and in undertaking doctoral research, need to have) outsider perspectives and vice versa" (p. 18). Despite this binary remaining dominant in research texts, they argue that the academic researcher is 'fluid', he/she fluctuates between the position of outsider and insider depending on a variety of contextual factors. Consequently, the power dynamics in any researcher-participant relationship along with the identity of the researcher are also in flux. They are contingent on a variety of factors. Although this research project has not been conducted through a poststructural lens, researcher fluidity is something that I identify with. I experienced an indefiniteness of self between and within interviews. It is for this reason that I felt it necessary to be continuously alert to where I was in relation to my project and my participants in the interview process and also within the IPA data analysis stage, as well as the potential implications of my positionality, it could influence my interpretation of my participants' stories and their experiences and assumptions (Berger, 2015, p. 231).

(Re) Presenting participants' accounts

Those conducting qualitative research perceive the researcher to be a "central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data" (Finlay, 2002a, p. 212). The ways in which I intended to present my participants' experience of special school headship stories, therefore required a great deal of reflexive thought. Having analysed my data, I began to write about my participants and their special headship experience in prose, aiming to retell my participants' stories, I adopted or, rather, fell back on the type of 'academic' writing I am used to

employing. Below is an illustrative extract from a text I wrote with the intention of retelling Rachel's career narrative:

> Rachel clearly values learning and listed the statutory CPD she has obtained (lines 3–12). She experienced early promotion and argues she was *"relatively young for such a senior position"* (lines 12-19). She recalls *"finding it hard to juggle a career and children"* (lines 16-17) and *"having to cope with professional jealousy from other colleagues"* (lines 219-20) in her school. She explained how she received sexist comments from another colleague relating to an after school hours CPD session *"shouldn't you be picking your children up at this time not running CPD" (lines 23-25).* She argues that she received sexist comments from male and female colleagues during her headship.

On reading this account I found that the style, tone and form I had used made me feel quite uneasy. I did not like the text, and feared that it did not do justice to the participant as well as the time and trust she had placed in me as a researcher. As I revisited my account of Rachel's special school headteacher story, I noted that my words occurred more frequently than hers. Rachel's words were brief, decontextualised and meaningless without my own. I found that my early attempts at 'interpretation' put words in her mouth. I also noticed that I was writing in a way that suggested that my version of Rachel's story of headship was 'true' and that no other interpretation was possible. Furthermore, I felt that the text papered over the non-linear idiosyncrasies in Rachel's narrative. In pursuit of an alternative mode of representing my participants' career narratives, I experimented with poetic representation (in my pilot study using the poetic troops of Gabriel (2000). This is a technique that Richardson (2001) believes to offer researchers "an opportunity to write about ... people in ways that honour their speech styles, words, rhythms, and syntax" (p. 880). Poetic representations are also said to convey individual's emotionality and therefore encourage an empathic reading. Richardson (2001) observes that "poems are consciously constructed to evoke emotion through literary devices such as sound patterns, rhythms, imagery, and page layout" (p. 879). They illuminate what it

is to feel and experience the world from another's point of view (Richardson, 2001). Schwalbe (1995) observes that writing poetry about our participants can "help us to understand them more fully" (p. 404). One of the most commonly cited advantages of poetic representation is that it "allows greater interpretative possibilities for the reader as the results are not filtered through the researcher-dominated interpretation" (Shinebourne, 2012, p. 175).

According to Richardson (2000), poetic representations force their readers to regard 'truth' as a problematic concept. This is because a poet plays with form, language and rhythm in order to communicate. Poems, therefore, are said to have a "greater likelihood of engaging readers in reflexive analyses of their own interpretative labour" (Richardson, 2001, p. 879). The text is therefore regarded as a co-construction that is fluid and in flux; it is not a singular and unproblematic 'true' story. Furthermore, it is suggested that this form of representation allows complexity and that which would otherwise remain hidden to emerge. Referring to the use of poetry in educational research, Cahnmann (2003) contends that poetic practice can uncover the "ever-changing complexity" of education and, in doing so, bring to the fore that which may be obscured in other mediums (pp. 29–34).

IPA researcher Pnina Shinebourne used poetic representation to present her participants' accounts of addiction and recovery. She observed that "poetic representations can enter into the hermeneutic circle together with the descriptive and the interpretative material... It portrays the individual's unique story, using the participant's own words, in a holistic manner" (Shinebourne, 2012, p. 182). Consequently, she found this technique to be compatible with IPA and its aim to explore the individual's sense-making and lived experiences. Drawing on Shinebourne's observations, I have chosen to represent my participants' experience of special school headship in poetic form (see Chapter 5). Each of the poems presented in this thesis aims to give an insight into participants' lived experiences of special school headship past, present and future. Following Richardson's (2001) approach, the speech style conveyed in each poem belongs to the participant being represented, but the poems, including the ordering of the interview data and

poetic devices employed, are my own (p. 883). Inevitably, "the sensibility of the researcher was implicated in the selection, interpretation and presentation" of the poetic material presented in this thesis (Shinebourne, 2012, p. 177).

Having discussed the reflexive stance adopted throughout this project as well as two key reflexive issues, the final section of this chapter addresses the issue of 'quality' both in qualitative research generally and in IPA.

Issues of quality

There is relatively little consensus concerning the standard by which qualitative research should be judged. The topic therefore is "a perennial issue" in social science (Hammersley, 2007, p. 287). Discussions that examine the notion of "quality" in qualitative research tend to feature the terms "validity" and "reliability". Creswell and Miller (2000) define "validity" in qualitative research as "how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them" (pp. 124–5). It is also about employing a rigorous and transparent methodology.

Being ethically sensitive to context

In order to demonstrate sensitivity to context, I conducted a wide-ranging review of the existing literature in the field of gender and educational leadership. This took a broad, UK perspective. Yardley (2000) observes "in much qualitative research the sophistication of the interpretation of the data is particularly crucial" (p. 220). It is therefore essential that researchers are aware of the theoretical, methodological and academic context in which their work is situated.

For Yardley, sensitivity also necessitates an awareness of the context in which participants are located, its social, cultural and political facets. She remarks "since language, social interaction and culture are understood by most qualitative researchers to be central to the meaning and function of all phenomena, awareness of the socio-cultural setting of the study is also important" (Yardley, 2000, p. 220). As a headteacher, I have personal

experience of the culture in which my participants are located. Furthermore, as detailed above, one of my reasons for adopting an IPA approach to research is that it allows for consideration of context. An examination of the educational climate in England, the broader status of women in the labour market as well as perceptions of headship in our society presented in the literature review chapter of this thesis will help to contextualise participants' special school headship narratives.

"Sensitivity to context" necessitates a reflective examination of the relationship between researchers and their participants. As Yardley (2000) remarks, researchers' behaviour and characteristics "influence the balance of power in the process of investigation - an issue which clearly also has a crucial ethical dimension" (p. 221). The researcher-participant relationship, the balance of power as well as my positionality as a researcher have therefore been of central consideration while designing, conducting and evaluating this study.

Commitment and rigour

Yardley (2000) states that commitment is a central feature of thorough and high-quality qualitative research. She states, "the concept of commitment encompasses prolonged engagement with the topic...the development of competence and skill in the methods used, and immersion in the relevant data (whether theoretical or empirical)" (Yardley, 2000, p. 221). The unstructured interviews I conducted required commitment to both my participants and the act of interviewing to ensure that the process produced rich, nuanced data. The open nature of the questions I asked required attentiveness to individual's special school headship stories and engagement in the particularities of participants' narratives. In the context of my study, commitment is also evident in my approach to data analysis. IPA requires complete immersion in individual transcripts in order to fulfil the requirements of each step. It necessitated lengthy engagement with individual stories of the experience of special school headship.

Rigour in the context of Yardley's (2000) work "refers to the resulting

completeness of the data collection and analysis. This depends partly on the adequacy of the sample - not in terms of size but in terms of its ability to supply all the information needed for a comprehensive analysis" (p. 221). As I stated earlier, it was decided during the design phase of my project that accounts gathered from unstructured interviews with six participants would generate enough rich data to facilitate a detailed and interpretative analysis. The steps involved in conducting IPA facilitated comprehensive and thorough engagement with the interview data.

Transparency and coherence

Yardley (2000) states that "the criteria of "transparency and coherence" relate to the clarity and cogency - and hence the rhetorical power or persuasiveness - of the description and argumentation" (p. 222). A "transparent" thesis necessitates disclosure and honesty regarding the actions taken during the research process. Transparency has been demonstrated in this thesis by including clear descriptions of the steps I used to collect, analyse and present my data. Smith et al. (2009) state researchers "may attempt to enhance transparency by carefully describing how participants were selected, how the interview schedule was constructed and the interview conducted, and what steps were used in analysis" (p. 182). It is anticipated that the present chapter and my appendices have gone some way in fulfilling this aim. Larkin and Thompson (2011) state, good IPA studies include an "appropriate use of extracts and commentary to achieve transparency" as well as an "appropriate level of contextual detail" (p. 112). While writing up my findings, I endeavoured to include substantial excerpts of interview transcription. In accordance with Yardley (2000), I felt that lengthy quotations would allow readers the power to discern for themselves "the patterns identified by the analysis" (p. 222).

Transparency necessitates researcher reflexivity. A possible criticism of my research design concerns researcher bias: the likelihood that my presence, perspectives and opinions will 'contaminate' the research process. In response to such criticisms, I argue that researchers are inevitably and unavoidably present in any research process. Stanley and Wise (1993) state

that research conducted via a feminist perspective is "rooted in the acknowledgement that all social knowledge is generated as a part and a product of human social experience" (p. 192). This recognition that researchers cannot remove themselves, their own life histories, perceptions and experiences from the research environment in order to study it compels researchers to be open about the ontological and epistemological values as well as the interpretive frameworks that they bring to their research. It also forces researchers to acknowledge the impact that they as individuals have on participants and the interview process. Being reflexive requires researchers to manage their personal biases by being rigorous and systematic at every stage of the research process. One way that I endeavoured to manage my assumptions and fore-understandings was to keep a research journal in order to record all thoughts and impressions. This later assisted me to be as reflexive as possible while writing up this thesis.

As well as being transparent, qualitative research needs to be clear and coherent. In Yardley's work, coherence "describes the "fit" between the research question and the philosophical perspective adopted, and the method of investigation and analysis undertaken" (p. 222). Throughout this chapter, I have made explicit the links between my feminist commitment to harnessing women's perceptions, voices and experiences, my epistemological stance, my theoretical perspective, my methodology and the data collection method I used. Given the studies aims and research questions, I believe the methodological and theoretical decisions I have made during the design phase of this project "fit" in a meaningful way. Yet, as Smith et al (2009) remark, the coherence and transparency of qualitative research such as mine is ultimately "judged by the reader of the finished write-up" (p. 182).

Impact and importance

Yardley (2000) states "the decisive criterion by which any piece of research must be judged is, arguably, its impact and utility" (p. 223). For those who take a more positivistic researcher stance, the usefulness of qualitative research is compromised by a lack of generalisability. Some positivist

readers may perceive an inability to detect reliable, large scale patterns in qualitative data and subsequently 'generalise' these to the wider social world to be a significant limitation. Yet, although the rich and 'thick' descriptive reports generated from IPA research cannot facilitate statistical generalisation, Kvale (2007) maintains that nuanced qualitative research can prompt forms of 'analytic generalisation' (p. 127). This is the idea that a rigorous analysis "can help researchers to understand other similar cases, phenomena or situations" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 171). This approach to generalisation is entirely in keeping with the views of IPA researchers who state that the results of an idiographic study have the capacity to speak to the analysis and investigation of other comparable groups or settings. Smith et al. (2009) maintain "idiography does not eschew generalisations, but rather prescribes a different way of establishing those generalisations (Harré, 1979). It locates them in the particular, and hence develops them more cautiously" (p. 29).

By taking a rigorous and systematic approach to research, I endeavoured to produce a study that contributes to our understanding of the under-representation of women in special school headship. I aimed to gain an insight into the ways in which women's lived experiences frame their subsequent special school headteacher future aspirations. As Yardley (2000) remarks, "theoretical worth is often of primary importance in qualitative research. Some analyses are important not because they present a complete and accurate explanation of a particular body of empirical data, but because they draw on empirical material to present a novel, challenging perspective, which opens up new ways of understanding a topic" (p. 223).

Finally, Yardley (2000) states that high-quality qualitative studies should have some form of socio-cultural impact. She argues that "many qualitative researchers consider research (like any other activity) to be inherently political, in the sense that all our speech and actions arise from a particular social context, serve some social purpose and have some social effects" (p. 223). It is anticipated that the study will be of interest to women teachers and leaders in a special school context as well as those who aspire towards a

career in education. My work may also be of interest to those working in the field of gender and educational leadership as well as those tasked with identifying and training potential aspirants to headship. It is anticipated that the findings of my project can be used to open up a dialogue with existing theories and ideas. My work endeavours to contribute to our understanding of female special school headteachers' experience of headship past, present and future.

Quality in IPA

Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) observe that there is "an apparent lack of understanding of how to demonstrate validity in an IPA research project" (p. 757). Endeavouring to rectify this, Smith (2011) outlines a guide for evaluating the quality of IPA research. While Smith notes the usefulness of Yardley's (2000) criteria, he states "I have not found them specific enough when confronted with the particular task of assessing the quality of a set of IPA studies" (Smith, 2011, p. 15). Working inductively with a colleague to review a variety of IPA studies, Smith (2011) outlined a series of principles on which the quality of an IPA paper can be judged. He concluded that an 'acceptable' IPA paper is one that:

> Adheres to the theoretical principles of IPA: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Is transparent enough so that the reader can see what was done. Presents a coherent, plausible and interesting analysis. Includes sufficient sampling from the corpus to show density of evidence for each theme (Smith, 2011, p. 17).

Building on these criteria, Smith (2011) argues that a 'good' IPA paper will have a clear focus, be based on high quality interview data and take a rigorous approach (p. 24). Furthermore, it will give adequate space to the elaboration of each theme, present an analysis which is interpretative not just descriptive, detail both convergence and divergence among participants and be carefully written (p. 24). Smith's criteria provoked many comments from the IPA community. Chamberlain (2011), for instance, took a rather critical stance and stated that "in practice, most of the criteria identified and

discussed are quite general in nature, and could apply to any qualitative inquiry using almost any methodology" (p. 52). Smith responded to these comments, clarified points of contention and emphasised the value of quality criteria aimed specifically at those conducting IPA studies (see Smith, 2011). With this in mind, I chose to present both sets of quality criteria in this chapter.

Summary

This chapter has described the research design used in this investigation. It has detailed the aims, research questions, feminist politics and ethics adopted throughout my work on the stories of special school headteachers' experience of headship past, present and future. I chose to explore the ethical implications of adopting a feminist perspective early on in this chapter. In doing so, I emphasise the centrality of the individual special school headteacher, her voice and perspectives within this study. Using Crotty's (1998) elements of social research as a framework, I moved on to explore my ontological and epistemological stance, the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the techniques used to gather qualitative data. The chapter then went on to explain the unstructured approach to interviewing and the pilot study.

After introducing the demographic characteristics of my participants and outlining the analytic stages involved in IPA, I turned my attention to the issue of reflexivity. Here I took a reflexive stance towards my positionality as a researcher as well as the task of representing my participants' accounts. This chapter concluded with a brief exploration of the issue of 'quality' both in IPA and qualitative research more generally.

The chapter that follows moves on to consider the findings and most important issues that arose from my in-depth, unstructured interviews with six women special school headteachers. It discusses and interprets the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged from my IPA analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Doing IPA ... constantly involves negotiating this relationship between convergence and divergence, commonality and individuality.

(Smith et al., 2009, p. 107)

Introduction

The first half of this chapter is concerned with the three superordinate themes that emerged from the IPA analytic process: (1) managing constraint, (2) motivating forces and (3) perceptions of special school headship and the future. These themes, along with their accompanying subordinate themes, are explored with the aim of providing the reader with a rich account of my participants' lived experiences and sense-making. The second half of the chapter discusses the findings of this research project in the light of extant literature and theory concerned with agency, structure and reflexivity.

Themes and analytic commentary

The findings of this study show how my participants' experience of special school headship past, present and future, have been shaped by both structure and agency. Examination of the data, however, revealed a large degree of heterogeneity between participants; each individual woman described mediating and making sense of structural forces and her own agentic capacity to act in a different way.

I divided the findings into three areas of analysis and phased interpretation.

The three stages of deeper interpretive analysis were the heterogeneity, agentic capability and the structural forces experienced by the special school headteachers. The heterogeneity was analysed using emergent themes and exploratory coding, I used the nuances and idiosyncrasies to identify agentic enabling, constraints and challenges faced by the female special school headteachers. The themes that emerged from the data became the superordinate and subordinate themes.

I found that the final product of the IPA analysis did not honour the single female special school headteacher story. I wanted to create a space within the thesis devoted to the individual narrative. I started to interpret the special school headship stories further, by writing poetic representations with the intention of preserving the complexity and idiosyncrasies of their special school headship stories. I created another layer of interpretation to the narratives giving the headteachers new opportunities to reflect on their stories, identify their agentic capability and to seek new opportunities from revealing their stories. The final depth of interpretation was explored in the conclusion. I demonstrated the structural forces experienced by the participants, giving the reader of this thesis the understanding of the unique way in which the special school headteachers were able to carefully negotiate and position themselves towards the constraints and affordances of their professional and personal lives. The conclusion gives the notion of the complex multi-layered and often contradictory stories of the special school headteacher within their individual special school context.

My IPA analysis of the six women special school headteachers' accounts produced three superordinate themes. These themes were labelled as follows: (1) managing constraint, (2) motivating forces and (3) perceptions of special school headship and the future.

Each of the themes highlighted above detail different aspects of the special school headteachers' lived experiences and perceptions. Using illustrative quotation to highlight the convergences and divergences between my participants, each theme will now be explored in turn.

Superordinate theme 1: Managing constraint

The first superordinate theme, 'managing constraint', relates to the challenges and restrictions that my participants reported having to actively negotiate throughout their careers. The data clustered under this theme demonstrate how the professional and public spheres of the women's lives intersect and blur. This superordinate theme comprises of three subordinate themes: (1) negotiating professional and caring responsibilities, (2) meeting

the challenges of leadership and (3) balancing work and well-being. It is to the first of these subordinate themes, 'negotiating professional and caring responsibilities', which this chapter now turns.

Negotiating professional and caring responsibilities

One of the ways in which my participants appeared to have made sense of their experience of special school headship was to track its trajectory in relation to personal events and circumstances. There were six mothers in my sample, and all six spoke about having to consciously strike a balance between the multiple and competing responsibilities of motherhood, and an upward career path in education. The experience and negotiation of these demands, however, varied immensely between participants. Table 5 illustrates the various strategies employed by the mothers in the sample to achieve a sense of personal and professional balance.

Table 5: *Work-family arrangements*

Mother as primary caregiver	Sharing childcare responsibilities with partner	Father as primary caregiver
Gay Rachel	Jo Amy Carmel	Sally

The oldest participant in my sample, Gay recalled taking a seven-year career break to give her children a good life and to take on the role of primary caregiver within the home. Indeed, the realities of caring for her children and fitting her career around her children was not possible so a career break was inevitable. Gay's responsibility as a parent was a prominent feature in her experience of special school headship. She recalled:

> "*I had my children young and my husband was in the Merchant Navy, I was a stay at home mum and brought up my three children and I went back to teaching seven years later…I was surprised on my return to teaching that nothing had really changed, it was the time when the National Curriculum was coming in. Special schools were in a difficult situation*" (Gay, p. 2, lines 36-42).

Gay explained that only a small number of teachers in her school were motivated, and special schools were waiting for change to happen and clear direction. Gay was starting to demonstrate an increase in her own motivation levels and this started to become an illustrative feature in her story.

> "*I was aware I had taken seven years out and became motivated, so I went to Teaching Training College and did a Diploma in Special Educational Needs. I started to gain a sense of identity and knew I was capable of filling the leadership gaps in my school*" (Gay, pp. 2-3, lines 48-50).

This extract illustrates Gay's perception that teaching is difficult to maintain if your partner works away when you have three young children to look after. Gay highlights a sense of pride that she was able to be a stay at home mum. This raises the question as to whether it was easier to be a stay at home mum and that Gay had taken ownership of her seven-year career break, she stated that "*I had decided to take time out because I had no relatives living near-by*" (Gay, p.2, lines 34–35).

Like Gay, Rachel also reported assuming the primary caregiver role, and this having an influence on her career as a special school leader. She recalled that the reason she embarked upon a career in teaching was because she perceived it to be a family friendly career choice. She explained that *"you have to work twice as hard when you have children of your own"* (Rachel, p.3, lines 75–76). Rachel's comments echo the findings of Raggal and Troman (2008) who found females were attracted to teaching "because of its reputation as a 'woman's job' (Steadman, 1985) that fits in with family life" (p. 586). Yet, Gay perceived the realities of teaching and caring for children was not a possibility due to her husband's job in the Merchant Navy and having no support from relatives. Rachel recalled experiencing juggling the demands of both roles and her identities. Within her interview, Rachel vividly described her thoughts which had motivated her to rethink the balance between the professional and personal facets of her life as a special school headteacher. She recalled:

"*I have always said, it is my belief men do not have the same journey as women, men are not always the ones doing the childcare, I know it is not true for everyone. I have ownership for my own limitations of being a good mother and a solid special school headteacher. My limitations of not being able to collect my children from school on time or take them to afterschool clubs, having the conflict of my headship duties, staying late for meetings and the burden of Governor meetings*" (Rachel, pp.1–2, lines 20–46).

Two divergent and conflicting discourses emerge from this extract: Occupational ideologies advocating linear and hierarchical career advancement and the responsibilities of special school headship, and traditional gender ideologies concerning women's role in the family. Rachel's words "*limitations of being a good mother and a solid special school headteacher*" illustrates the ways in which she perceived her special school headship responsibilities to be all-encompassing and overwhelming. The demands of her role are juxtaposed with her role as a parent within this extract thus culminating in a strong sense of guilt, an emotive response echoed by the mothers and primary school headteachers in Bradbury and Gunter's (2006) study. Taking ownership for her perceived limitations of being a good mother and a solid special school headteacher was a potent realisation for Rachel. "*I did manage to negotiate flexible working and was able to leave school at lunchtime on a Friday*" (Rachel, p. 2, line 46).

What is of particular interest about the way she recalls her limitations is the lack of agency and guilt she reports. It is the combined constraints of workload and childcare responsibilities. Notably, later on in her interview, Rachel spoke candidly about her perception of being "*a young deputy and having children has been so hard to juggle the responsibilities and moving into headship has been even more difficult. I have been promoted quite young and it has not been without a struggle, I have felt lonely at times and it has affected my self-esteem and confidence*" (Rachel, pp. 1-2, lines 16–38). This perception clearly differs from Gays' beliefs about motherhood and teaching and the choices both special school headteachers made during

their experience of negotiating professional and caring responsibilities. This highlights the ways in which women of a different age range had experienced balancing a career in special school teaching and leading with childcare responsibilities.

While Gay and Rachel recalled being the primary caregiver for their children, Jo, Amy, Carmel and Sally described balancing childcare responsibilities with their partners.

These women tended to report that their partners' occupations and flexible working patterns had enabled them to negotiate an effective balance between the responsibilities of work and home. Carmel for instance, reflected that her husband's job in the education sector had helped her to balance taking care of her three children for many years before being promoted as a special school leader. She recalled:

> "*My husband being in the teaching profession has helped me become an outstanding special school teacher, I worked part-time for many years then when I was ready moved into senior leadership*" (Carmel, p. 1, lines 3–7).

Similarly, Sally described the flexibility that her husband had to work from home when he was ill as an enabling factor when supporting their three young children. She stated:

> "*I never wanted to be a special school headteacher, I had a relationship with my husband where his teaching career had really taken off, I was content working as a part-time special school teacher. Without notice my husband became unwell and he had to work more flexibly from home. I had more time to be in school and my special school leadership career path just seemed to change and the opportunities just came to me*" (Sally, p. 1, lines 5-13).

What is evident from both women's narratives is the ways in which their partners and their own special school career trajectories intersect and inform one another. Furthermore, Jo, Amy, Carmel and Sally spoke about their

husbands' careers as being underpinned by pragmatic as opposed to ideological concerns; there is little discussion of either partners' agency or structural constraints acting on each other family or narratives, only what is considered to be best for the families.

While Gay and Rachel described assuming primary responsibility for childcare, the four other mothers in the sample recalled balancing childcare responsibilities with their partners.

The women's accounts also point to the varying degrees of freedom that individual mothers experience to negotiate solutions to the challenges of combining paid employment and child-rearing. As mentioned in the literature review, there are existing typologies of women teachers' career strategies (see, for example, Evetts, 1994 and 2000). These act to categorise the different approaches that women teachers and leaders have taken towards balancing paid work and caring within the home. These classifications however do not take into consideration the possibility of stay-at-home father households. Kramer et al. (2015) observe that this is a non-traditional and rarely studied work-family arrangement. Yet, according to the Pew Research Centre (2014), stay-at-home father households are becoming less rare. Sally discussed the fact that her career started to take off when her husband was home more to look after her three children. "*He became a stay at home dad when his health started to change*" (Sally, p. 1, lines 5-6). This could potentially illustrate a generational shift in attitudes concerned with childcare responsibilities and parenting. Congruous with this observation, two of the mothers in this study reported that their partners had assumed the primary caregiver role while they were engaged in full-time paid or flexible employment. These women's lived experiences are a strength in the IPA approach. Coleman states: "younger women headteachers are more likely to adopt a 'male' model of career than their older colleagues*"* (Coleman, 2007).

While analysing my data, I also found that some of the participants reported that their work-family arrangements had changed over time. For instance, their children had grown older (e.g. Carmel, Gay), and their partners changed their careers. These changes in circumstance had meant that the

balance between work and family life had also shifted. Dunn et al., (2013, p. 3) stated "there is an increasing number of stay at home fathers that may mark a subtle shift in family arrangements" (Dunn et al., 2013).

The fluctuating nature of these women's experiences mean that they too do not fit neatly into the career models explored in the literature review. In order to account for my participants' special school experiences, there is therefore a need for a model that takes into account the complexity and idiosyncratic circumstances of individuals. With this in mind, I believe that my participants' lived experiences of balancing a career in special education with parenting would be better thought of as a continuum, with stay-at-home mother households at one end, stay-at-home father households at the other and varying 'balancing' strategies found in between (including part-time working, shared responsibility and paid childcare). This continuum is illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 11: *A continuum of work-family arrangements*

Stay-at-home mother households   Stay-at-home father households

$$\longleftrightarrow$$
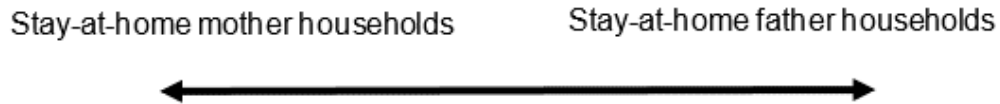
Opting for simplicity, I have chosen to avoid conceptualising my participants' work-home arrangements as a rigid typology in order to illustrate the multiple and varied ways in which parents actively negotiate work and family commitments. The continuum aims to allow for the possibility of both individual choices, constraints and circumstances as well as changes over time. This broad continuum, however, is not intended to obscure the "unquestioned and unspoken assumption that women will take primary responsibility for childcare" which persists in our society (Smith, 2016, p. 83). Indeed, there was an underlying sense among my participants that childcare is still a predominantly female activity.

In summary, the subordinate theme 'negotiating professional and caring responsibilities' represents the individuals ongoing and conscious negotiation between professional and personal duties. It reveals a great deal of diversity

in the ways in which the individual women in this study perceived and managed their childcare responsibilities. While some of the women reported feeling constrained by the (actual or potential) expectation to care, others described feeling free to choose and actively negotiate an effective balance between work and home.

Meeting the challenges of leadership

This study found that the special school headteacher role is a complex, sometimes ambiguous position that revealed through the agency and constraints of its incumbents.

The subordinate theme entitled 'meeting the challenges of special school headship' reflects the women's lived experiences of actively striving to meet the often conflicting demands of the role. The special school headteachers reported a variety of responsibilities. Table 6 illustrates the special school areas of responsibility for which participants stated they were accountable at the time of interview.

Table 6: *Special school headteacher specialism and area of responsibility*

Cognition and Learning Special School	Autism Special School	Moderate Learning Disabilities and Autism Special School
Gay	Rachel	Amy
Jo	Sally	
Carmel		
Cognition and learning Specific learning difficulties affect one or more specific aspects of learning. This encompasses a range of conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. Cognition and learning may encompass most of the curriculum, such as for pupils with moderate or severe learning disabilities	**Autistic Conditions** Autistic spectrum disorder is a condition related to brain development that impacts how a person perceives and socialises with others, causing problems in social interaction and communication. The disorder also includes limited and repetitive patterns of behaviour.	**Moderate Learning Difficulties** The general level of academic attainment of these learners will be significantly lower than of that of their peers. Their cognitive ability and/or attainment are usually below the second percentile. Pupils have difficulty with literacy and numeracy skills. (Autism as stated)

SEND Code of Practice (2014)

The special school headteachers I interviewed seemed to have a clear sense of the role they played in the leadership of their schools and their specialisms. They reported being aware of and having actively negotiated their unique and particular position in the schools in which they worked. There was, however, a sense among the interviewees that special school headship required individuals to continually and consciously oscillate between strategic organisation and planning on the one hand, and having to react to the unpredictable nature of school life on the other. Amy, for instance, remarked that despite her formal job title and duties:

> "*My responsibilities are ... whatever happens. It is completely reactive, I am working hard to move the school from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Good' the journey is tough and challenging, difficult conversations are common place*" (Amy, p. 6, line 112).

Within this extract, we gain a sense of Amy having to be in a continual state of readiness in order to actively negotiate the volatile aspects of her role. For some participants, the unpredictable nature of the special school headteacher position is a source of constraint and frustration. Gay, for example, described her current role in the following way:

> "*Being a special school headteacher is a very interesting role because you have a lot of power, but there can be a conflict between yourself as a leader and the school culture*". "*I was the first female special school leader within a group of male headteachers, they were like mates and not actually strategic leaders. There was a clear conflict between myself and the educational culture*" (Gay, p. 3, lines 70-75).

Gay's assertion paints a picture of a special school headteacher who is unable to act as thoughtfully and deliberately as she would like due to a difficult school culture. This extract, then, illustrates a gulf between Gay's actual and ideal modes of working.

Despite special school headteachers various leadership responsibilities, it is interesting to note that all of the women spoke about the importance of teaching as special school headteachers. They believed that continuing to

teach and retaining contact with the classroom helped to preserve a child-centred approach to their work and build credibility with their teaching colleagues. Being engaged in the practicalities of teaching appeared to be a significant part of their professional identities as special school headteachers. For instance, Sally perceived her teaching abilities to be linked to her professional self-worth. She described her teaching practice in the following way:

> "*It is a point of pride with me that I've got to be as good if not better than other people who would teach them. I do put pressure on myself*" (Sally, p. 5, line 83).

This extract exposes the sense of responsibility Sally feels as a special school leader, as well as the high expectations she has of herself as a professional. Her drive to be "*as good if not better*" than the other teachers in her school could also be linked to her position in the school hierarchy. There is a sense that as a special school headteacher she is in a very visible position and therefore aware of being watched, or possibly judged, by others lower down the occupational echelons. She appears to feel the pressure to prove that she has earned her position as a senior leader. There is, then, perhaps an element of competition and sense of perfectionism within this extract. This potentially speaks not only to an internal drive to be a successful teacher and special school headteacher, but also the external requirement that teachers are competitive and accountable in the current educational climate. Sally's use of the word *"good"* is interesting. It is clear from Sally's narrative as a whole that she has a very definite idea about what makes a *"good"* teacher, but viewing the word in this context makes me wonder to what extent her use of the word *"good"* is informed by Ofsted grade descriptors and their rather rigid delineation as to what makes a "good teacher". According to Ball (2012), it is a regime of accountability. Forrester, (2001) argues accountability with a "performance-driven culture" can be seen as a "heavy burden" and an increase in "bureaucracy" and a "form of control" (p. 7).

Research studies suggest that some women teachers perceive school

leadership to be entirely removed from students and their learning (see, for example, Smith, 2015; Loder & Spillane, 2005) who discuss role conflict and dissatisfaction in the work place. While my participants reported that one of the affordances of their current role was that it allowed for contact with the classroom, some described a stark tension between teaching and the more leadership and strategic responsibilities attached to their role. Consequently, some of the women recalled not being able to prioritise their teaching practice in a way that they would like. Jo's account for instance was tinged with the difficulties of balancing teaching with the multiple and fluid leadership responsibilities assigned to her as a special school headteacher. She stated:

> "*There's always that in your mind that you've always got a dilemma, you know that [teaching's] not your first priority... because everything else is and then you beat yourself up because your lessons aren't as good as you'd want them to be*" (Jo, p. 4, line 109).

Jo's declaration that teaching is not her *"first priority"* speaks to the *'greedy'* nature of the leadership work she is engaged in and the ways in which the demands of her current post leave very little room to teach in a way that she would like. Like Sally, Jo spoke about the pressure she puts on herself to deliver "*good*" lessons. The idea that she *"beats herself up"* over this suggests that Jo is highly critical of herself in the professional arena. There is, again, a sense of perfectionism here. The way she describes her experience of teaching as a special school headteacher hints at a reflective professional who is actively trying to negotiate, but has not yet found, a balance between the varied and conflicting duties assigned to her as a special school headteacher. Interestingly, a similar tension is reported by Harris and colleagues (2003) who suggest that headteachers can experience an intense pressure to fulfil both their teaching and leadership obligations. Overall, it seems that headship can be experienced as a conflict between the worlds of teaching and leading.

Another aspect of their working lives that the women reported as requiring strategic thought and conscious negotiation was the construction of a special

school headteacher identity. In all of my participants' narratives this was described as an ongoing process. In accordance with previous studies (Marshall & Hooley, 2006), the women tended to perceive themselves as having different roles as special school headteachers. The women suggested that the special school headteacher role required deliberate and mindful consideration as to how to position oneself. Some of the women spoke about the need they perceived as headteachers to dissociate themselves from colleagues lower down the occupational hierarchy. Sally, for instance, reported:

> "*Any member of staff, at some point, could be called into my office and I have to have a very difficult conversation with them. If I'm too friendly with them then you can't ... I suppose you do have to have that professional line. I think that's what it is, isn't it? If they go out for a drink at the end of term, I wouldn't go with them*" (Sally, p. 5, line 179).

The nature of Sally's role and her responsibility for staffing is invoked here to justify her self-imposed remoteness from those she manages. Her repetition of the word *"them"* in this extract perhaps says something about the ways in which she has made sense of her role as a special school headteacher. It implies that she perceives herself to be physically and emotionally distinct from the teachers she interviews, monitors and disciplines. Her reference to the social life of her school is interesting. Her language is agentic and emphasises choice; her assertion that she *"wouldn't go"* for a drink at the end of term implies she has the option of going if she so wishes, and that Sally's distance from her teacher colleagues has been consciously created, transmitted and preserved by her. Loder and Spillane, (2005) take findings from their research on role conflict:

> in an effort to resolve this tension, the participants employed a cognitive strategy whereby they attempted to keep their identity as teachers and leaders (Loder & Spillane, 2005).

As well as maintaining a level of desired or undesired detachment from

teacher colleagues, the women also spoke about their perceived need to be guarded in the workplace. This included being "*careful who you trust*" (Amy, p. 4, line 93) and what you reveal of yourself while at work. Jo, for instance, spoke about the need she perceived to suppress her true feelings in school. Speaking about the powerful emotions that she had experienced at work, she stated:

> "*I have to be much, much more careful, in terms of the weak moments. Those times when I do experience frustration, or dissatisfaction, or annoyance at anything that's not gone the way that I hoped it would do. I have to make sure that I have a much more measured approach to things all the time*" (Jo, p. 5, line 84).

This extract illustrates the ways in which Jo has felt she has had to deliberately conceal the emotional dimensions of her professional life. Her perception that she needs to do this *"all the time"* perhaps implies that she feels somewhat constrained by her leadership role; it is potentially driving her to cultivate an emotionally neutral 'front'. Viewing this extract via the lens of Goffman's (1959) work on impression management, it could be argued that Jo has actively organised and positioned herself to present a particular impression to those working in her school. It seems that 'back stage' - i.e. away from the gaze of her superiors and subordinates - Jo has determined that emotions such as frustration, dissatisfaction and annoyance are incongruent with what she considers to be a special school headteacher identity.

To summarise, the subordinate theme 'meeting the challenges of leadership' speaks of the tasks and tensions that my participants associated with the special school headteacher role. The women in this study spoke about special school headship as a position that requires one to establish a balance between leadership and teaching, strategising and reacting. It was also described as a role that required an individual to consciously construct and manage a particular professional persona. Overall, it seems that special school headship was perceived as a position informed by both structural expectations, and individual human agency.

Balancing work and well-being

Aelterman et al. (2007) define 'teacher well-being' as "the result of harmony between the sum of specific environmental factors on the one hand and the personal needs and expectations of teachers on the other hand" (p. 286). In spite of the positive emphasis of this definition, the majority of the literature on teacher well-being focuses on occupational stress, burnout and mental health issues (Bricheno et al., 2009, p. 6). These subjects were referred to by all of my participants, and their exploration tended to be interwoven with talk about responsibilities and expectations. Many of the women in the sample perceived their assigned workloads to be a potential threat to their well-being. Sally, for instance, was particularly concerned about the long term consequences of working at her current pace and an inability to psychologically *"detach"* from work. She reported finding it difficult to find the time to relax after a busy week:

> *"I struggle to switch off mentally ... It's always in the background. I don't sleep on a Sunday night, my previous headship was smooth sailing compared to my new role, the staff culture is very, very difficult"* (Sally, p. 4, line 63).

Within this extract, as well as Sally's narrative as a whole, there is a sense of continual activity and busyness. Sally reported that even when she is physically away from work she is unable to stop thinking about her professional life. Sally stated the *"realisation that a difficult staff culture can destroy your aspirations as a leader"* were also factors that kept her awake at night (Sally, p. 10, line 205). It is interesting that, despite claiming that this cognitive and affective process is going on in the *"background"*, Sally noted that the demands of her occupation had bled into her world outside work and altered her sleeping patterns. Notably, there is no indication in her narrative as to how things could be different; Sally reported feeling constrained by her workload rather than feeling agentic or in control to use her power and position to act otherwise.

A similar lived experience was described by Amy who stated:

"I will just find work to do. I always did. I'm not very good at relaxing. I genuinely don't know what to do. I had a day once where I didn't really have anything to do and I just watched a whole season of Casualty and I just felt so guilty" (Amy, p. 9, lines 178-182).

Here Amy aligns relaxation with self-reproach. It seems that as both a special school headteacher and a mother she was used to being in a state of continual activity. The emotionality inherent within this extract is striking. She describes feeling guilty for doing something she enjoys. It is as if she perceives a lack of productivity to be wrong. Both Sally and Amy appear to be consumed and colonised by their occupations, and therefore seem unable to escape a sense of obligation and responsibility attached to their work, even at home. While talking about the sheer number of expectations placed on her as a special school headteacher, Gay observed:

"Mental health is a big thing with teachers, you know, that's a big worry for me. With teachers who go off with stress or anxiety or breakdown or, you know, and you hear more and more about that" (Gay, p. 8, line 234).

Archer (2010 p. 58) says that: "change or constancy involve dialectical, interactive relationships over time between social form – structure and culture and agency". This extract illustrates feelings of anxiety. Gay perceives mental illness to be common among those in the teaching profession and hence perceives herself to be at risk. The pressure she feels to work effectively and balance her responsibilities appear to have resulted in apprehension, not only for herself but those teachers she is charged with leading. In a similar vein, the concepts of 'burnout' and sustainability littered Sally's narrative. She frankly stated: "*I'm 45 and I'm burning out ... It's constant, 12, 15 hours a day*" (Sally, p. 7, line 203). This extract suggests that the boundless nature of her work is taking its toll. The juxtaposition of her age with the concept of 'burnout' which we may typically associate with a lack of energy, motivation and enthusiasm is telling. It potentially points to a lack of steady progression in her career to date. Within her special school headteacher story she spoke about how her commute into work and the

nature of her role were *"directly affecting my ability to exercise and shop"* (Sally, p. 4, lines 68-70). She also stated *"I don't think this job's sustainable now"* (Sally, p. 4, line 71). Sally's comments illustrate her difficulties in trying to balance her work and well-being, as well as the ways in which her concerns for her health are influencing her perceptions of her current role; she appears to believe herself to be constrained and limited by the workload attached to special school headship in a changing educational landscape.

The majority of the data clustered under this subordinate theme suggests that the women felt constrained and somewhat controlled by the reality, workloads and responsibilities of special school headship. Conceivably, the fears expressed by the women are symptomatic of a perceived lack of individual agency to negotiate an acceptable work-life balance. Interestingly, while feelings of constraint emerged from the majority of the women's narratives, a minority of interviewees asserted that achieving a balance between one's professional and personal lives was something that individual special school headteachers have the power to actively negotiate and control. It was argued that special school headteachers are not necessarily 'victims of workload'. Perceiving herself to be agentic and therefore able to balance the constraints and affordances of her role, Carmel stated:

> *"Workload is something you constantly have to think about and something you have to monitor and you do that through your time management. I have specific cut off points where I think I've done enough now and now I need to have some 'me time'"* (Carmel, p. 5, lines 100–104).

Rachel reported repeatedly that children and headship has been difficult when balancing work and well-being. The sense of self-determination in this extract is striking. It speaks to the possibility of shaping one's own experiences of special school headship despite the 'greedy' educational culture.

This finding will form part of my recommendations for more training and development of special educational needs teachers and leaders from initial

teacher training and the inclusion of SEND leadership in the future planning of National Professional Qualifications.

Overall, the subordinate theme 'balancing work and well-being' reflects the challenge of maintaining a sense of personal well-being, despite the various roles and responsibilities attached to special school headship. The data suggests that many of my participants felt constrained and limited by both their individual workloads and an educational culture which requires increasing amounts of work output, productivity and commitment from its workforce. Some of the data did however suggest that, in such a climate, the onus is on the individual to actively pursue, monitor and maintain their own personalised sense of work-life balance. According to Archer (2010), being an active agent involves: "defining, refining and prioritising concerns and elaborating projects out of them, leading to shaping and reshaping the social world" (Archer, 2010).

Superordinate theme 2: Motivating forces

The second superordinate theme, 'motivating forces', focuses on the factors that were reported to have inspired my participants with a sense of agency, and infused them to pursue advancement opportunities throughout their career trajectories. There are two constituent subordinate themes: (1) influential others and worthwhile learning opportunities, and (2) values and the desire for social justice. This chapter will now explore the first of these subordinate themes, 'influential others and worthwhile learning opportunities'.

Influential others and worthwhile learning opportunities

Throughout their interviews, many of the women identified colleagues who had been particularly influential during the formative years of their careers. Rachel, for instance, recalled a female special school headteacher that she had worked for as an NQT. She stated:

> "*I just wanted to be like her. She was a great leader and very nurturing, she looked after everybody and everything. When I was a new young teacher I just wanted to be like her*" (Rachel, p. 1, line 12).

It is clear from Rachel's narrative that the example set by this headteacher has stayed with her throughout her career. The woman's behaviour and the respect that others bestowed on her appeared to facilitate Rachel's professional aspirations as a special school leader. Her repetition of the phrase *"I wanted to be just like her"* suggests that Rachel spent time observing her headteacher's behaviour, and taking cues as to how she should behave in the professional arena. Arguably, Rachel's description of her role model is stereotypically gendered in nature: *"she was a great leader and very nurturing".* Within this description, Rachel tells of this woman's caring, almost maternal nature. Rachel's desire *"to be like her"* suggests that she perceived this role within her school's context to be desirable and, possibly, even powerful.

Most of the talk of influential others referred to those who were more advanced in their careers and held positions of both leadership and power. Jo, for instance, pointed to a female headteacher who had led her school during a particularly turbulent moment in its history:

> *"It was when the school went into special measures whilst I was working as a special school teacher and not part of the leadership team. She was pulled out of retirement ...they couldn't recruit because it was such a challenging special school. She came in, and to watch her transform a very demoralised staff team and be this inspirational figure head ... I watched how she gelled the team together. She transformed the education process. She ironed out the behaviour issues. She was just an amazing person really"* (Jo, p. 3, lines 44-56).

It is clear from the positive language that Jo uses to describe her former headteacher (i.e. *"amazing", "inspirational")* that she respected her. Although she is described as being of retirement age, this headteacher's activity, agency and desire for change is emphasised within this extract. Described as somebody who *"was very well thought of"* (Jo, p. 3, line 59), this woman was perceived by Jo as a role model whose opinions had changed the direction of her career trajectory. She stated:

"When the head went back into retirement the school appointed a weak leader that made many errors of judgement…..I was determined to support the new head,…overtime I became a member of the leadership team and eventually Governors were keen to work with me and wanted me to become a substantive headteacher of the challenging special school" (Jo, p. 5, line 61).

The encouragement and support of previous and current headteachers was referred to by all of my participants. This talk was not confined to female heads. Indeed, many of the women spoke about male headteachers who had supported and encouraged their career advancement. Sally, for instance, remarked:

"He would say things like 'now you need to be doing this'. He used to put me in things like this collaborative group, which meant I worked with all the headteachers from the special schools. He was gearing me towards headship, without me really knowing it. The new opportunities gave me the confidence to take on leadership roles as roles began to arise. He was phenomenal, he was my mentor" (Sally, p. 1, line 244).

The opportunities that Sally's headteacher created for her are described in a way that suggests they were highly enabling. According to Cook, (2006, p. 4), teachers can experience their disequilibrium as productive or unproductive. Cook's research findings identified emerging themes, one theme being "resiliency and resolve" which enabled some of the women in her sample to renegotiate their relationship in the world (Cook, 2006). The idea that her headteacher was preparing her for special school headship without Sally *"really knowing it"* suggests this was happening gradually and in keeping with her professional development. Within this extract, we get a sense of the faith and trust Sally's headteacher placed in her to represent her school in the local community and future opportunities with the Local Authority to develop new special provisions for Autism. The benefits of having an encouraging headteacher was also spoken about by the other women in the sample. Carmel, for instance, spoke favourably about the

headteacher who first promoted her:

> "*My second head was female, no children, very career driven ... a lot of respect for her. She was the person that gave me the promotion, if you like, and who nurtured me towards my first position as assistant head in a special school for Cognition and Learning*" (Carmel, p. 2, lines 16-17).

> "*I perceived promotion as a reward for my experience and dedication to the role of special school teacher and Inclusion Manager*" (Carmel, p. 1, line 10).

Carmel speaks very positively about the woman who *'gave'* her a promotion. A similar sentiment was expressed by Amy who exposes the importance of peer to peer support for special school leaders. Both women spoke in ways that suggested it was something other than their own agency and leadership potential that had prompted their early career advancement. A related idea is present in Gay's career narrative. She spoke about the faith that her headteacher placed in her when appointing her as a deputy headteacher after returning to teaching after a seven-year career break to look after her three children. She recalled:

> "*It was a substantive deputy headteacher post, I was passionate about special school leadership. The opportunity for promotion led me to complete my Master's Degree in Education... I think he was the first person to say 'I think you can do this'*" (Gay, p. 3, lines 50-54).

Within Gay's career narrative, she reported believing this to be the moment that she realised she could make a real difference to special school education. It was her headteacher and his faith in her that are reported to have changed that perception and given her the drive to move forward with confidence.

Overall, the data explored above points to the instrumental role that a supportive special school headteacher can play in one's career trajectory towards headship. It was via their special school headteachers that the

women in my sample were able to gain additional leadership experiences and/or the boost required to perceive themselves as potential aspirant leaders. In Guihen's (2017, p.1) study of *The two faces of secondary headship: Women deputy headteachers' perceptions of the secondary headteacher role*, she conducted an IPA study using semi-structured interviews with twelve participants. The data showed that while making decisions about their professional futures, most of the women had contradictory views of headship the participants talked about role conflict "plagued" by risk, performativity and stress, whereby others focused on the agentic capability headteachers have to change their communities. The research highlights ways in which the belief in the power of headship to make a meaningful difference to the lives of young people can support some women to aspire towards headship and can influence their aspirations. (Guihen, 2017).

Influential others in the women's career stories were not always situated above them in the occupational hierarchy. Sally and Gay both spoke about the ways in which their career aspirations had been affirmed by the opinions of those that they had been tasked with leading. Sally remarked:

> *"If people that have worked for you say you would be a great head that means more to me than a head saying you would be a great head ... That's the most encouraging thing. I think the people below you make you believe in yourself and the people above you enable you to do it"* (Sally, p. 3, lines 47-52).

Despite there being a clear sense of hierarchical and disparate power relations within this extract, Sally appears to value the opinions and perspectives of those she manages. There is a sense that those she has led encourage and augment her self-belief as a leader. The support of those 'below' was also referred by Gay who stated:

> *"You get to a point where it isn't people above you anymore ... It becomes people below you in the institution where they'll say 'I wish you were the head' or 'it would be different if you were doing this'"*

The recollection of others' comments about her leadership skills is a striking feature of this extract. The comments appear to focus on the gap between what is and what could be if Gay were a headteacher. They also seem to position Gay as a facilitator of change both at the individual and organisational level. At this stage Gay's intentionality became stronger, the notion that everyday experience is a consciousness of something. The idea that Gay has remembered their words well enough to recall them within her interview suggests that they are meaningful and have potentially helped her to make sense of herself as an aspirant headteacher.

Alongside influential others, many of the participants spoke about leadership programmes that had inspired and instilled within them a sense of agency to climb the next rung of the career ladder. Training opportunities were described as having been key in helping them to construct their leadership identities as well as to equip them with a certain type of career capital. The NPQH was spoken about by all six of the women in the sample. Five reported having recently finished the programme, and one reported being in the midst of completing the programme at the time of interview (see Table 7).

Table 7: *My participants and the NPQH*

Ongoing	Completed	Comments
Jo	Gay	Interesting, made a difference
	Rachel	Enjoyed, I still use the research materials in my work today
	Sally	Informative, supported my promotions into leadership
	Carmel	Made a difference Useful, gave me light bulb moments
	Amy	Helpful, enjoyed being with other like-minded leaders

For many, the NPQH was described as a definite step towards headship and illustrative of an active willingness to be a special school headteacher.

Another leadership programme referred to in the women's narratives was the headteacher development programme 'Future Leaders'. Out of the six women in my sample, one had completed the programme and therefore identified as 'Future Leaders'. Amy was one of these women and remarked:

> *"Everything they've done is directly tailor made to do the job I do and that's been amazing. They've got the network which gives you strength, you've got the inspiring speakers that keep you topped up. You've got a sense of responsibility for the time they've invested in you"* (Amy, p. 3, line 53).

Amy's positivity and sense of commitment to the Future Leaders programme leaps out from this quotation. It is clear that she found her involvement in the programme to be both a worthwhile and enabling experience. It appears that she perceives herself to be morally and personally invested in The Future Leaders Trust and views the sociability it creates among its participants to be a significant strength.

It is clear from Amy's perceptions of the Future Leaders programme that she felt that she had benefitted from and been inspired by the support and guidance of its network. I wonder whether this hinted at a sense of isolation or disconnect they might feel without it. Amy reported that special heads get very little other support than the NPQH, Future Leaders programme and special head support groups.

Despite the women's references to programmes and qualifications, there was some recognition among my participants that no amount of leadership development opportunities could ever fully prepare them for the special school headteacher role, and that a great deal of their leadership training would occur during the first few months and years of headship. Despite this, all of the women reported perceiving their deputy headteacher position to be a good stepping stone towards special school headship. This finding does not support previous research which suggests that deputies tend to feel that their experiences as deputy heads inadequately equipped them with the skills and knowledge needed to lead a secondary school (see, for example,

Ribbins, 1997; Guihen, 2017). A possible explanation for this discrepancy may be that there are now training programmes such as the NPQML, NPQSL and NPQH and Future Leaders designed for aspirant headteachers. This may mean that deputies are less reliant on in-school training as they once might have been, and feel able to take control of their own professional development. Many of the women in my sample recalled having had both pastoral and curriculum responsibilities in the past and they tended to believe that this had given them an overarching view of school leadership. This variety of experience is a sharp contrast to the exclusively pastoral roles that women in senior leadership teams were stereotypically aligned with in the 1980s (McBurney & Hough, 1989). There has been a shift in the past decade demonstrating deputy headteachers progressing to head of school and concentrating on the curriculum, Bateson (2016), many pastoral roles are allocated to non-teaching staff in schools such as higher level teaching assistants.

Jo and Amy describe being strong curriculum managers and good classroom practitioners giving an *"increase in motivation at middle leadership level"* (Amy, p. 3, line 51). "*I started to grow my leadership ambition from being a good curriculum manager and classroom practitioner*" (Jo, p. 10, line 116). Jo and Amy recognise the value of shared practice by middle leaders providing worthwhile learning opportunities and an increase in motivation to dig deeper into the growth of the curriculum whilst increasing the knowledge and influence of others.

In summary, the subordinate theme 'influential others and worthwhile learning opportunities' reflects the facilitating experiences and professional relationships which had motivated my participants to pursue career advancement toward special school headship. The colleagues, managers and learning opportunities identified by the women were reported to have had instilled within them a sense of agency to climb the next rung of the career ladder in a special school setting. In keeping with my earlier observations, these enabling factors were perceived, experienced and made sense of differently by each of the individuals in the sample. My own sense

of agency has come from others influencing my leadership journey. During the analysis of my participant's stories, I could see how an increase in motivation has led to success in leadership and positive experiences when influenced by other leaders.

Values and the desire for social justice

One of the most striking features of my participants' accounts was their commitment to their work and the motivation they experienced to improve their students' life chances. The data demonstrates that the women's values had been key drivers throughout their special school career trajectories; they had inspired the women to move forward in their careers towards a special school headship. Ball (2003) argues that in a performative educational culture teachers and leaders are required to set aside their principles and beliefs in order to organise themselves in accordance with evaluative measures. Yet, for the women I interviewed, 'value' had not replaced 'values' (Ball, 2003, p. 217). They were passionate about their work in special education, values driven and keen to emphasise the satisfying elements and complexity of their role. Almost all of the women described their careers in ways that illustrated a strong connection between their work and core sense of self. For Sally helping her students make progress was a highly satisfying experience. She stated:

> *"Something special comes from most of them ...and it's powerful to think you've influenced their lives"* (Sally, p. 2, lines 32-34).

It is evident from the way Sally described her interactions with the young people she teaches with additional learning needs, that there is an emotional and altruistic dimension to her working life. She perceived her work to be "powerful" and capable of not only influencing pupils' academic outcomes, but their lives beyond the school gates in terms of their mental health and well-being. Most of the women reported that the most satisfying element of their current lives as special school headteachers was being in the classroom if only for one lesson, and continuing to teach. They described taking a very child-centred approach to their role. Gay, for instance,

remarked:

> *"If it comes down to students as themselves rather than targets and progress, supporting the individual with their personalisation and preparation for their adult lives"* (Gay, p. 7, lines 138-140).

This extract is interesting as it highlights Gay's values, and perhaps a perception that the current educational landscape in England is too data driven and results oriented and is often not in line with the recording of progress for students with special learning needs. Gay aligned herself throughout her interview with a person-centred, empathic mode of leadership and wanting to make a real difference locally, regionally and nationally. The phrase *"it's me"* suggests that this approach is part of what Gay perceives to be her professional identity or persona. A similar idea was expressed by Carmel who recalled asking the following question when deciding whether or not to implement a new initiative:

> *"Is this in the best interests of the children, rather than just ticking a box for Ofsted?"* (Carmel, p. 2, lines 11-15).

Carmel spoke quite regularly in her narrative about the importance of an "inclusive school" and in doing so exposed a commitment to social justice. Similar child-centred values were echoed by Jo, who spoke about the satisfaction she derives from *"seeing other people grow, I wanted to create and embrace change to improve education for pupils with special educational needs"* (Jo, p. 1, line 10), and Carmel again who stated:

> *"By far the most satisfying part of my job is being with the kids with additional learning needs ... That's just priceless. That's the thing that I wanted to be a special school teacher for and that's still the thing that I still get every day"* (Carmel, p. 9, lines 172-181).

There is a clear sense of purpose within this extract. *"Being with the kids"* had motivated Carmel to become a special school teacher and this was clearly perceived to be an enjoyable, *"priceless"* part of her current role. The idea that she described herself as having contact with her pupils "*every day*"

suggests that Carmel is far from detached from the special school she leads; she does not perceive herself as being isolated in an ivory tower of senior leadership. As well as working with young people, many of the women spoke about the satisfying role they play in helping their students to achieve their goals. Amy, for instance, remarked:

> "*For me, the most satisfying part is seeing children being as successful as they possibly can and this is important for the children's preparation for adulthood*" (Amy, p. 10, lines 191-194).

Again, Amy is concerned with the whole person, and their lives which takes place both inside and outside of school. Within this extract, however, she advances a particular and potentially narrow definition of success. It is a definition that focuses on academic accomplishments and further education. This possibly exposes a belief that education is transformational and capable of facilitating social mobility. Within her narrative as a whole, Amy spoke about the duty she felt as a school leader to *"make a difference"* in low income communities. She spoke about being driven to exert a positive influence at the individual, school, community and societal level. In doing so, she made an argument for social justice, equality and social mobility.

> "*Being consistent becomes authentic with values based leadership, special school staff want good authentic leadership to support young people's learning outcomes*" (Amy, p. 11, line 10)

These values were shared by the other women in the sample. This commonality was particularly evident when the women spoke about the types of schools and communities they have worked in. Sally, for instance, spoke about her desire to make a wider social difference for special educational needs within her career and leadership influence. This was described as having driven her professional decision-making.

> "*I need to pay back the community ... I'm very much about don't let the postcode influence the outcome, grasping learning opportunities to give pedagogical growth and inclusivity*" (Sally, p. 2, line 21).

The use of the word *"need"* suggests that Sally feels duty-bound to help the children with additional needs within her care. She appeared motivated to tackle social inequality, and felt that the leadership responsibilities attached to her role as special school headteacher enabled her to do so. Carmel reported a similar sense of obligation and drive. She described how her desire to *"make a difference"* had influenced the types of schools that she had chosen to work in both as a special school teacher and senior leader:

> *"I have to work with disadvantaged, struggling kids in low income areas"* (Carmel, p. 4, lines 81-82).

Both Sally's and Carmel's comments illustrate high levels of commitment and motivation. The women appeared to be driven by the work they do and perceived their profession to have a greater social purpose. It seems that their work not only brought some measure of satisfaction, but also inspired a sense of agency and the drive to continue. The women appeared to perceive themselves to be morally compelled to tackle social inequality in their remit as special school headteachers, and this instilled in them a sense of vocation. The women's comments echo the findings of Harris and Chapman (2002) who suggest that leadership in a 'challenging' school is empathic and about "displaying people-centred qualities and skills" (p. 3).

Interestingly, while analysing the women's narratives I found that much of the language that the individuals in my sample were using to express their educational values was remarkably similar. For instance, the term *"challenging schools", "special schools"* and the phrase *"making a difference"* appeared numerous times both within individual transcripts and across the sample as a whole. As opposed to values being side-lined or eradicated in a performative educational climate, then, it could be argued that the 'values vocabulary' used to express our professional principles in such a culture becomes rather standardised. This homogeneity is reflected in government policy documents. For instance, the white paper entitled 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' (DfE, 2016b) makes numerous references to "challenging schools" (11 times), the imperative to "improve outcomes" (5181 times), achievement regardless of "background" (30 times) and teachers'

abilities to "transform" students' lives (12 times). These phrases are very consistent with those used by my participants. This potentially suggests that central government are not only demarcating the policy climate in which the teaching profession works but also outlining the lexicon in which that work may be described.

To summarise, the subordinate theme 'values and the desire for social justice' reflects the ways in which my participants perceived their child-centred beliefs as having framed and shaped their special school headship journey to date. Their principles were reported to have informed their career decision-making and the types of schools they had chosen to work in (both past and present). Yet, while the women had not compromised their values in the face of performative measures and that their deeply-held principles were described as catalysts for action, I questioned the extent to which the language my participants used to articulate their values and desire for social justice was entirely free from the political agendas and linguistic constraints of central government.

Superordinate theme 3: Perceptions of special school headship and the future

The third superordinate theme, 'perceptions of special school headship and the future', describes my participants' professional aspirations and their view of their future professional selves in a special school context. The data clustered under this theme suggests that the ways in which the women, as potential aspirants to headship and in their current role as headteachers, perceived the special school headteacher role was largely dependent on whether they saw the position as constraining or enabling. Three subordinate themes emerged from participants' accounts: (1) a poisoned chalice, (2) an opportunity for influence and (3) making a decision. The following section of this chapter will explore each one in turn.

Leadership encounters and burdens

My study found that one participant of my sample openly aspired towards special school headship. Of the remaining five, two of the women had

rejected the possibility of headship in the early stages of their career while the other three reported elements of uncertainty. Table 8 illustrates the spread of special school headteacher aspirants across the sample.

Table 8: *Special school headteacher aspirants*

Aspirants	Undecided	Non-Aspirants
Gay	Sally	Rachel
	Amy	Jo
	Carmel	

Rachel (a non-aspirant) was the only one of my participants to talk about headship in a consistent and uniform manner throughout her narrative. She focused exclusively on her perceptions of the negative aspects of the special school headteacher role. Conversely, the aspirant in the sample as well as those who were unsure about their professional futures appeared to hold dual, contradictory views of special school headship: one perception consisted of a constraining role afflicted by risk, accountability and pressure, while the other focused on the agentic capacity headteachers have to transform the lives of young people with special learning needs. This subordinate theme focuses exclusively on the precarity and disincentives that the women saw as being rooted in special school headship. Its label, 'a poisoned chalice', is inspired by the work of Chagger and Bisschoff (2015).

Congruent with the findings of Earley et al. (2012), the women perceived increased accountability measures and the pressures placed on special school headteachers during Ofsted inspections to be a significant disadvantage of special school headship. In light of this, they tended to speak about the relative stability of deputy headship position compared to the riskier reality of being a headteacher. Amy, for instance, perceived headship to be more precarious than when she held the position of deputy head. She remarked that headship is:

"A big risk ... staff reorganisation led to redundancies, leading is stressful and difficult. I was petrified of bad feeling and anarchy from the staff, with Ofsted around the corner this was high risk, I feel like a football manager at times". (Amy, p. 4, lines 132–149)

This extract suggests that Amy perceives Ofsted to be a threat to the stability and reputation of those holding special school headship posts. Her belief that she may lose her job *"just like that"* suggests that she fears the punitive action of Ofsted would be immediate and without warning. This extract also hints at the power that Amy perceives Ofsted to have; they are believed to have the autonomy to label a special school headteacher as 'inadequate' or 'requiring improvement'. Amy's assertion that there is a *"football manager"* quality to headship is a multifaceted and complex comment. It could refer to the public nature of the role; the ways in which headteachers' results, like football managers, are widely available and subject to the gaze of all. The comparison could also imply that headteachers, like football managers, are exposed to scrutiny and judged by the outcomes of their work alone. Another potential meaning could centre on the lack of safety and time for complacency those holding these posts experience as they are quickly removed if judged to be incapable.

Like Amy, Rachel also described the power that Ofsted have to define and destroy teachers' careers. This was one of the reasons Rachel cited as to why she did not aspire towards special school headship whilst her children were still young. It was clear throughout Rachel's narrative that she perceived Ofsted inspections to be potentially stressful, Rachel reported:

"I did not want headship and it was stressful in special school because of the complexities of the students", which she states is *"too accountable and hard work".* Rachel reported she was *"too young for the level of responsibility"* (Rachel, p. 2, line 27).

Rachel's sense of self appeared to be closely interwoven with her occupation and workplace and childcare. One of the emotional repercussions of her experience was that Rachel had started to fear for the future of the teaching

profession:

> *"I think there's a lot of the human side going out of teaching, and I think that's because everyone is under so much pressure under the cosh of Ofsted and all the target setting ... this percentage and that percentage and this wasn't always the case in special education"* (Rachel, p. 9, lines 183-188).

Within this extract, Rachel described feeling a sense of anxiety, loss and grief. She appeared concerned with what is being abandoned in the quest for a more accountable education system. Rachel perceived change in educational policy and Ofsted inspection procedures as aggressively threatening values-based and empathic educational practice. Her fear for the future was reported to be another of the reasons why she had chosen not to pursue special school headship any longer and has decided to take time out of the education system.

One of the most interesting findings concerned the women's impression that the educational culture in which they work is unstable and subject to continuous change. The unpredictable nature of policy climate in education was perceived to be littered with unexpected challenges and pressures for the new or existing special school headteacher. Sally, for instance, stated:

> *"The rules keep changing ... My second headship in special has been difficult and an experience of hostility and challenge, professional jealousy and undermining staff has been evident in my recent headship. My leadership journey started positively and it has become much harder over time. Finding a new direction has been difficult"* (Sally, pp. 3-4, lines 112-137).

This extract suggests that Sally was using her perceptions of the educational culture in which she was working to inform her professional aspirations. The phrase *"hostility and challenge"* suggests she felt highly uncertain in the policy climate in which she was working. Conceivably, current feelings of insecurity were not perceived to be a firm foundation on which to build professional aspirations and/or to consider pursuing her headship further.

One of the most interesting aspects of this quotation is Sally's reference to "*professional jealousy*". Here she exposes a perception of the teaching profession as being governed or dictated by external decision makers. The idea that she is not the one making up the "rules" suggests she does not perceive herself to be agentic or free to work unobstructed.

Similarly, Amy reported feeling discouraged and constrained by rapid and often unpredictable changes in educational policy. She stated:

> *"The constant changing of the goalposts is really disheartening sometimes, just when you think you're making progress, and just when you think you're getting somewhere, and you're going to be able to embed something, it all changes" (*Amy, pp. 8–9, lines 165-169).

Amy's comments illustrate her frustration with educational policies, requirements and targets that had proven to be temporary and uncertain. Despite being in a position of authority in the school in which she worked, Amy appeared to feel controlled and determined by external governmental forces and Ofsted. She describes feeling unable to keep up with changes in educational policy and act autonomously. This suggests that she felt that excessive accountability measures were stifling her agency, autonomy and professionalism. Arguably, Amy perceived herself to be lacking the agency to influence positive, localised change due to what is happening on the wider governmental stage. Her reference to 'goalposts' is similar to Sally's reference to 'rules' and suggests a perception of teaching as an externally governed 'game'. This idea also suggests a perception of the educational landscape defined by outcomes, results and 'winners'.

Another frequently cited disincentive in my study concerned the financial and corporate aspects of the special school headteacher role. Consistent with Cranston's findings (2007), the women in this study believed that as headteachers they would be expected to be both educational leaders and explicitly managerialistic "akin to a CEO in the private sector" (p. 110). It is notable that the participants believed that being a head would be significantly dissimilar to their day-to-day lives as deputies and, as such, they felt ill-

equipped to deal with the CEO-like duties of headship. Jo, for instance, remarked that she was anxious about the:

> *"Financial side of it, managing that budget, I can't manage my own personal budget, and then professionally you wonder whether you could do it, and I think you probably have to do it because otherwise you'd lose your job, but I know that puts a lot of people off as well"* (Jo, p. 24, lines 483-487).

This extract conceivably suggests a lack of confidence and a tendency to question her own skills and abilities. The comparison between a small scale, private budget and a large school budget is interesting and, again, points to the interrelated and fluid nature of our public and private lives and skill sets. The perceived precarity of special headship also features in this extract. Jo expresses a fear that she would lose her job and the security attached if she were found to be lacking the required abilities to be a successful, corporate special school headteacher. Her reservations about financial management were shared by Rachel who stated:

> *"I think really now it is a businessman's job almost, rather than a teacher's job"* (Rachel, p. 3, line 102).

Interestingly, those who were somewhat risk-tolerant and had decided to aspire towards and apply for headship regardless of the disincentives they perceived handled similar anxieties differently from those who were more risk averse and undecided. For instance, Carmel, who was applying for headships at the time of interview, perceived budgetary responsibility to be a potential concern especially with the special schools designated school grant. Yet, within her interview, she reported that she had actively combatted these anxieties by consulting her current Executive head. She recalled:

> *"I've said to her that I need more experience on the finance side. She said no you don't, you just need a good financial director or a decent school business manager"* (Carmel, p. 4, line 187).

There is a sense of agency within this quotation. The reader gets the sense

of Carmel consciously negotiating the constraints she perceives in order to advance her career.

The participants tended to feel that special school headship was a very public role. While Gay reported finding that aspect of the role attractive, the majority felt that the position could leave them exposed to the potential of professional embarrassment should things go wrong. Rachel, for instance, warned that a one-off incident or a wrong decision as a headteacher *"could ruin a lot of people, both professionally and personally ... ultimately it's my neck on the line"* (Rachel, p. 4, line 105). The phrase *"it's my neck on the line"* suggests that Rachel perceives special school headship to be a highly risky endeavour. This risk is clearly anxiety inducing in that she perceives headship as having the capacity to '*ruin*' her. This finding is consistent with those of previous studies. James and Whiting (1998), for instance, found that many of the deputy headteacher respondents in their study harboured self-doubt and were "apprehensive of failure and the public disclosure of mistakes" (p. 13). There are two possible explanations for the fear of failure detected in my study. One explanation concerns a potential lack of self-efficacy and/or self-esteem. Indeed, gender differences in confidence, both its outward performance and its ability to prompt women to pursue career advancement, have been explored by a number of researchers who have suggested that men tend to feel more confident in their professional abilities than women (see, for example, Coleman, 2002; McLay & Brown, 2001; Thornton & Bricheno, 2009). Another possible explanation is that some of the women had gained a rather bleak understanding of the headteacher role by working alongside existing headteachers. Rachel, for instance, recalled:

> *"I've worked for a special school headteacher who's left teaching and headship because of ill health"* (Rachel, p. 5, line 189).

Carmel described her special school head of school role and the limitations she had experienced due to the autonomy of the existing executive headteacher. Carmel stated, *"my self-doubt led me to pull out of a headteacher position and I regret it"* (Carmel, p. 4, lines 50-51).

In light of these experiences, doubts and reservations in relation to special school headship may appear to be prudent. Coleman (2012) suggests a focus is needed on active agency, that looks beyond barriers, to the "valid reasons for women's career choices" (Coleman, 2012).

To summarise, the subordinate theme 'a poisoned chalice' reflects my participants' reservations about special school headship. All of the women I interviewed spoke about being a special school headteacher in ways which could be considered at best limiting and constraining, and at worst risky and potentially damaging to the individual. Their narratives paint a picture of the special school headteacher role as highly precarious, especially in a rapidly changing and therefore unpredictable educational climate.

Making a decision

This final subordinate theme is concerned with the affective and cognitive dimensions of looking forward to one's professional future. Like most of the subordinate themes that emerged from the interviews, it is possible to detect both feelings of constraint and agentic action in the women's stories about their career decision-making. On the one hand, the participants highlighted various factors that may limit their professional futures. These tended to expose layers of self-doubt and anxiety. On the other hand, the women described actively strategising in order to forge a future career trajectory for themselves in special education. They reported using their past experiences, perceptions and resources to make an informed and logical decision as to whether or not to climb the next rung of the specialist career ladder. Women special school headteachers' impressions of their future selves, then, are shown to be based on considerations of both structure and agency.

Existing studies point to the part that emotions play both in career decision-making in education (Bolton & English, 2010) and in educational leadership more generally (Cliffe, 2011). The majority of the women's narratives were littered with anxieties about their professional future. Some of the sample attributed feelings of uncertainty to a lack of confidence in the professional arena. Rachel, who reported to be largely uncertain about special school

headship, directly referred to her perceived lack of confidence and the way that she felt this had influenced her career decision-making:

> "*As women we spend too long with that self-doubt ...so that's something I've either got to grow out of or just that's part of who I am now at 42 and that might always prevent me having the courage and confidence to go, 'yeah I am the head and this is how it's going to be'*" (Rachel, p. 4, line 110).

Smith (2011) discusses structural inequalities with serving female headteachers. In Smith's research a number of issues were raised by female participants that linked to perceived gender issues that could be considered as structural inequalities, such as feelings of self-doubt and anxiety about juggling family life. A number of female leaders in the sample thought that gender was not a specific barrier to them, but they would need to prepare for a leadership role linked to managing men and joining a male dominated environment. Described by one participant as "locker-room behaviour" and the preparation of male and female leaders having different leadership styles, (Smith, 2011).

Within this extract, Rachel associates her perceived lack of self-confidence with her gender. She describes feeling that this may restrict or prevent her aspiring towards and applying for special headship in the future. It is evident from the extract above that Rachel associates special school headship with bravery and self-belief. These are qualities she appears to align with masculinity. Similar gendered assumptions were also found in Gay's career narrative. She felt that the over-representation of men in special school headship was a direct result of women's lack of confidence. This was an issue that she perceived as limiting and constraining all women in the professional special school arena. She remarked: *"There seems to be lots of males in the job who believe in themselves",* Gay refers to the *"boys club",* *"but females don't seem to believe in themselves – they need that affirmation"* (Gay, p. 4, line 106).

Self-belief is again described here as a male trait. It is interesting that both

women and men are homogeneously grouped together in this extract, and there is no recognition of individual differences within gender categories. Gay argues that all women need collegial, encouraging and collective working environments to succeed. Given that she perceives men to dominate special school headship positions as a result of their assumed higher levels of self-belief, it seems that Gay believes that headship affords less opportunities for *"affirmation"* than other roles in the special school context. Within my own reflexivity, one way of making gender more visible to others is to collect more stories of women leaders as I am doing in this thesis. According to Lukes, (2005) most people with substantial structural power are men, even organisations with more women than men employees are usually controlled by men. He states that men at work have more power, control more resources and exercise more influence than women, (Lukes, 2005).

Feminist theory posits that subjectivity is made up of different and interrelated threads of social identity including age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Carbado et al., 2013). It is an argument against essentialist thought that classifies men and women as homogeneous groups. The findings of this study suggest that some of the women's professional aspirations and thoughts about the future were influenced both by their age and the threat of ageism. For instance, the narratives of Rachel and Gay are plagued with concerns about being 'too old' or 'too young', and the women appeared to fear the constraining impact that their ages may have on their future working lives.

Alongside talk of the potential constraints they may encounter in their professional futures, the women also spoke of their agentic capacity to make logical and informed decisions about their future career trajectories. They spoke about having to consciously negotiate the constraints and affordances of the career options open to them thus highlighting their ability to exercise agency and choice. The women's narratives suggest that their decision-making was largely determined by (1) their self-perceptions and life projects, (2) the advice and expertise of their personal and professional communities, (3) their observations of and relationship with the policy climate in education

and (4) their values and beliefs. These considerations appeared to be both distinct and interrelated in the interview data. They highlight the complexity and multiple concerns involved in making an active decision about one's professional future. Figure 12 illustrates the interrelated factors that my participants felt needed to be considered when making a decision about their professional futures. These four factors are shown to be situated within the national policy climate. At the heart of this diagram lies the agentic individual who is tasked with reflecting on the different facets of their professional and personal lives before making a decision. Below this diagram is a brief exploration of each of these four factors. Archer (2010).

Figure 12: *The factors involved in my participants' career decision-making*
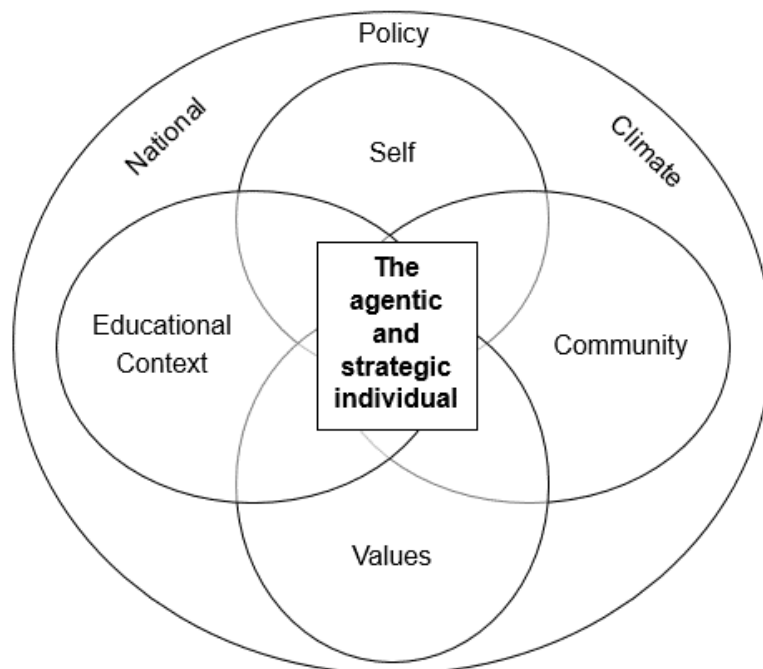
Firstly, this study found that participants' career decision-making was affected by the ways in which they saw themselves and their life projects. All of the women reported being actively engaged in assessing the potential next step in their careers (i.e. special school headship) in relation to who they are and where they wanted to be. It was possible to perceive the women in my sample as being in active pursuit of a form of professional self-realisation, and that this endeavour was guiding their decision-making. There were

numerous references to *"fit"* in the data; all of the women appeared to question within their interviews the extent to which special school headship was congruent with their fundamental sense of self. Jo, for instance, remarked that she would only pursue headship *"when that feels right and it's the right position for me in which ever school that happens to be"* (Jo, p. 3, line 96).

Secondly, the women's accounts suggested that their career decision-making was informed to varying degrees by the advice and support of their personal and professional communities. This finding is in keeping with my earlier observations concerning the women's relationships with 'influential others' (see subordinate theme 'influential others and worthwhile learning opportunities'). Indeed, there was a sense among some interviewees that they discussed their career moves and dilemmas with others in order to make sense of them. Confidants from the women's wider professional networks and/or their private lives were cited as being both sounding boards and sources of guidance. The example below comes from Rachel's narrative who reported discussing whether or not to apply for the headship at her current school with her family: *"Remaining motivated in seeing children learn supported my decision making"* (Rachel, p. 2, line 59). It seems that via the acts of talking, reflecting and consulting Rachel was able to make sense of the decision she had to make, and move forward in an agentic manner.

Thirdly, the data revealed that the educational context in which the women were working exerted an influence on the women's career decision-making. As I reported under the subordinate theme 'a poisoned chalice', the women's perceptions of the educational landscape influenced their impressions of special school headship, and in turn the ways in which they envisaged their future professional selves. Some of the women in this study felt that their person-centred values were being threatened by rapid educational change. They spoke about accountability measures, externally imposed expectations and policy changes that they perceived as compromising the nature of the work they do. My analysis revealed that these participants were drawing on their perceptions of the educational landscape when picturing their future

professional selves and career trajectories. Sally, for instance, stated:

> *"When times are tough, being self-reflective, using collaborative approaches, work with the challenge and staying professional to make the difference"* (Sally, p. 5, lines 179–211).

> *"As a new leader to my current school I started to expose huge challenges, I took ownership of my own leadership ability to cut through professional jealousy and to create a communication strategy with staff, Governors and trade unions"* (Sally, p. 5, lines 180-182).

Finally, it was found that the women's career decision-making was affected by their values and attitudes towards young people in our society. Throughout their narratives, my participants appeared to be actively assessing the extent to which the next rung of the career ladder was congruent with their beliefs about special education. As I identified earlier, there is a wealth of 'values talk' in all of the women's accounts, including the following comment from Amy:

> *"I'm a genuine person in a difficult leadership position. I want to move the school from 'Requires improvement' to 'Good'"* (Amy, p. 6, line 337).

To summarise, the subordinate theme 'making a decision' reflects the women's career decision-making. The meeting of structure and agency, affection and cognition, was found to be embedded within this process. The data demonstrated that, to varying degrees, all of the women in the sample referred to both (a) the anxiety inducing possibility that their future career trajectories may be limited or constrained in some way, and (b) their agentic capacity to make a strategic decision regarding their future professional selves. This finding appears to highlight the multiple layers of my participants' career decision-making.

Structure, agency and reflexivity

So far this chapter has presented a qualitative analysis of six women special school headteachers' stories and experience of headship past, present and the future. The themes that emerged from my IPA analysis illustrate the ways in which structural forces and human agency had shaped, defined and sometimes constrained the special school headteachers' journey towards headship. The following section will discuss the findings of this study in relation to theoretical literature concerned with structure, agency and reflexivity.

Looking at my data as a whole, it is possible to see structural forces and agentic human action as being intertwined in the women's stories and experience of special school headship. For instance, some of the participants spoke about the ways in which their ability to pursue career advancement was dependent (albeit to varying degrees) on both their own agentic career planning and the societal expectation placed on women to take on a caring role within the home. This interdependence is evident in Gay's narrative, for example, who remarked that *"the choices we've made as a family have enabled me to do what I do professionally, taking a seven-year career break defined me as person"* (Gay, p. 2, line 10).

Giddens (1979) argues that "every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member" (p. 5). Instead of being passive 'structural dopes' "determined by social structures" (Heracleous & Hendry, 2000, p. 1260), human beings are perceived to be highly knowledgeable with the capacity to rationally reflect on and justify their actions (Tucker, 1998, p. 76). Some of the data collected throughout this study supports Giddens' beliefs about the primacy of human knowledgeability over social forces. As I reported earlier in this chapter, my participants described consciously negotiating the constraints and affordances of their professional and personal lives in order to pursue special school career advancement. They positioned themselves throughout their narratives as individuals with the agentic capability "to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14).

This was evident in the women's stories about special school career planning and its value in the current educational climate. Sally, for instance, remarked that career advancement in special education *"is all about planning"* (p. 2, line 87). The women's capacity to make active and strategic decisions was also apparent in the introspection they reported as being part of their role as senior leaders in a special school context. For example, Amy described consciously reflecting on her day in the following way:

> *"I'm very self-analytical, so I'll be talking to myself about how could I have dealt with that differently, you know, could I have approached it in a different way? What would I do next time? ... I unpack my day if you like when I'm driving home"* (Amy, p. 3, line 78).

There is a great deal of self-knowledge and active reflection in this extract. It suggests the power of reflective human action over potentially constraining experiences and encounters. Careful contemplation was also evident in the ways in which the women talked about their special school professional futures. As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, all of my participants were engaged in weighing up the pros and cons of special school headship past, present and future at the time of interview. Contradictory images of the special headteacher role emerged. Arguably, the conflicts inherent within this finding highlight the extent of and the complexity of the women's reflective powers.

Giddens argues that social structures are not (necessarily) synonymous with constraint, they are "always both constraining and enabling" (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). His work suggests that there are certain structures associated with educational leadership and the labour market in England and these have created the conditions in which certain lived experiences and actions are possible for women special school headteachers. However, it also suggests that individuals, as knowledgeable, rational and reflective agents, can transcend and alter the expectations (gendered or otherwise) ingrained within such structures. Structural properties, then, become malleable to a certain extent. Via the lens of Giddens' theory, it is possible to see some of the special school headteachers in my study attempting to constitute social

structures as much as they were constrained by them. For instance, it could be argued that by actively opting for stay-at-home father arrangements, Sally was actively transcending the potential constraints stemming from societal discourses and attitudes associating women with child-rearing and caring. They were "able to 'act otherwise'" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14).

The women in my study live in a society in which leadership is routinely aligned with masculinity, where there continues to be fewer women special school headteachers than men and that childcare is stereotypically deemed to be 'women's work' in the professional as well as the domestic domain. Like the women in Tomlinson et al.'s study, my participants reported experiencing these aspects of social life as structural constraints that they were required to negotiate.

Internal conversations

In light of the limitations discussed above, the work of Margaret Archer (2003; 2007; 2012) facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which women special school headteacher stories and experience of headship are framed and shaped by structural properties and human agency. Through the lens of Archer's work, the special school headteachers in this study can be seen as a heterogeneous group of agentic and highly evaluative individuals. The women in my study were 'active agents' or "people who can exercise some governance in their own lives" (Archer, 2007, p. 6). This form of self-direction can be found in the women's stories about special school headship, planning and balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. Unlike Giddens who advances the 'duality of structure', Archer retains an 'analytical dualism' or separation between human agency and social structure (Archer, 2010). It is possible to see this distinction or separation in the way that she talks about the 'projects' we embark on as human beings. The women's lived and special school leadership trajectories explored in my study can be thought of as an ongoing 'project' i.e. they "involve an end that is desired, however tentatively or nebulously, and also some notion, however imprecise, of the course of action through which to accomplish it" (Archer, 2003, p. 6). Archer's work suggests

that the projects we pursue as human beings are shaped by two distinct sets of powers, those of structural properties and those of human beings themselves. In this study, the women spoke about the ways in which their special school headship stories had been limited or constrained to various extents by societal expectations concerning women and caring, governmental pressures and the workload of the special school headteacher. In the women's stories of the challenges they had encountered throughout their special school leadership trajectories towards headship, it is possible to see the causal powers of structural forces being exercised as constraint (Archer, 2007, p. 9). Conversely, in the women's stories and experience of special headship planning and actively organising the disparate facets of their lives we see the individual using her causal powers to act. In advancing their leadership in special school education, then, the women in my study engaged with both their agentic powers to act and the structural and cultural properties of our society *(*p. 7). Their narratives revealed that they had been required to confront and mediate the opposing and distinct forces of agency and structure in order to advance their special school leadership career.

The women who took part in this study were highly contemplative. During the interviews, I was granted (albeit limited and partial) access to their thinking as they reflected both on their special school teaching and leadership practices, as well as the career moves they had made in the past and present and were intending to make in the future. Archer argues that the reflexive powers we hold as human beings mediate "the effects of our circumstances upon our actions" (Archer, 2012, p. 6). She posits that our reflexivity functions through the 'internal conversations' that we have with ourselves. It is within the interiority and relative safety of our own minds that we are said to "deliberate internally upon what to do in situations that were not of our making" (Archer, 2003, p. 342). 'Internal conversations', then, are argued to be mediatory mechanisms between social structures and human agency. Our inner-dialogue not only negotiates the influence that social forces have on us but also "our responses to them" (Archer, 2007, p. 15). It is these inner conversations with ourselves, Archer maintains, that "enable us to be the authors of our own projects in society" *(*p. 34).

IPA directs the researcher's attention towards the diversity as well as the commonality present among individuals. Indeed, my analysis highlighted the complex differences between what at first glance appeared to be a relatively homogeneous group of women who were faced with the same special school leadership dilemmas reported in their stories. My findings indicate that individuals reacted very differently to the potentially constraining social forces they had encountered on their experiences to date. For example, my data demonstrated very different reactions towards the responsibilities of motherhood. While Rachel and Sally described being active agents who had worked reflexively so as to remain in full-time employment in special education while their children were growing up, Gay reported having to subordinate her professional aspirations temporarily to take care of her children. Arguably, Giddens' structuration theory tell us very little about the heterogeneity that exists between individuals; it does not seem to account for diversity and the possibility that individuals may respond differently to the limitations and affordances they may encounter as they make their way through life. Archer's work, on the other hand, suggests that individuals who are similarly placed, such as the women in my study, "do not respond uniformly" or take the same courses of action when confronted with the same structural properties (Archer, 2012, p. 6). To illustrate the diversity that exists among individuals she identifies four distinct types of internal conversation: (1) communicative, (2) autonomous, (3) meta-reflexive and (4) fractured. In outlining distinctive modes of reflexivity, Archer argues that internal conversations are "radically heterogeneous" and that each one will lead to a different 'stance' "towards society and its constraints and enablements" (Archer, 2003, p. 342).

As I anticipated would be the case when exploring the stories and experiences of special school headteachers, there was no evidence to suggest that any of the women in my study could be termed "fractured reflexives". All participants exhibited a great deal of reflexive power and agentic action. The data did, however, suggest that all six women had ways of thinking about themselves in relation to their circumstances that could be termed 'autonomous', 'meta-reflexive' or 'communicative'. Drawing on

Archer's distinct types of internal conversation, then, it is possible to posit three different types of potential special school headteacher aspirant: the autonomous potential aspirant (a strategic and decisive leader), the meta-reflexive potential aspirant (a values-oriented professional) and the communicative potential aspirant (a person-centred educator). This typology reflects the distinctive ways in which the women special school headteachers in this study spoke about their special school headship stories and experience of past, present and future. It also illustrates the three paths the women in my study described taking to achieve what Archer (2003) calls *modus vivendi* or "a set of practices which, in combination, both respects that which is ineluctable but also privileges that which matters most to the person concerned" (p. 149). The three groups that I outline below, however, are merely 'ideal types'. Archer (2012) suggests that, although individuals exercise different modes of reflexivity at different times, most people have a dominant form of internal conversation (p. 12). In adopting this theory for the purposes of this thesis, however, I do not intend to replicate the rigidity that is perhaps present in Archer's original analysis and framework; I do not wish to rule out the possibility that an individual may fit into more than one category or switch between modes at different times in their special school leadership journey. Furthermore, in positing these 'ideal types', I do not intend to obscure the differences that exist between individuals or rule out the possibility that there may be other forms of reflexivity yet to be theorised.

What is presented in Table 9, then, is a 'best fit' approach to identify participants' perceptions of their stories of special school headship as well as the structural forces and agentic action framing their experiences of past, present and future. This categorisation is intended as an analytic lens through which to view the lived and envisaged stories and experiences of individual women special school headteachers.

Table 9: *Three types of special school headteacher aspirants*

Autonomous aspirants Defined as strategic and decisive leaders	Meta-reflexive aspirants Defined as values-orientated professionals	Communication aspirants Defined as person-centred educator
Carmel Gay	Amy Sally	Rachel Jo

The autonomous potential aspirant

Autonomous potential aspirants are self-sufficient, calculated and decisive. The women who matched this type most closely identified themselves as strategic and decisive special school headteachers. They had prioritised and invested a great deal in their professional lives. This meant that their well-being and personal relationships had "been subordinated to this ultimate concern" (Archer, 2003, p. 213). Those delineated as autonomous potential aspirants described a clear history of career planning and having very definite professional goals. These women spoke about approaching their "occupational futures in a strategic manner" (Archer, 2007, p. 214). Autonomous potential aspirants, then, reported "knowing what they want and also knowing a good deal about how to go about it" (Archer, 2003, p. 254). They were confident social actors who actively searched for career advancement opportunities, and were able to anticipate and avoid any constraints they may encounter on the route to fulfilling their professional aspirations (Archer, 2003, p. 253; Archer, 2007, p. 214). Overall, autonomous potential aspirants talked about their future professional selves in ways that expose a "self-conscious delineation of the next stage(s) in ... [their] desired work project" (Archer, 2007, p. 214).

Table 10: *Participants characterised as autonomous special school*
headteacher aspirants

Autonomous aspirants/strategic and decisive	
Name	**Illustrative Quotations**
Carmel	"A pivotal moment occurred during my performance Management" (p. 2, lines 24-25). "I realised I wanted to become a senior leader and to have a measurable impact, to lead staff teams on the Inclusion agenda" (p. 2, lines 31-33). Carmel is sustaining her self-contained internal conversation leading to direct action (Archer, 2010).
Gay	**"**I became deputy head in two years in my first school" (p. 3, lines 50-51). Direct action taken by Gay. "Two years later I became headteacher whilst doing my Master's degree" (p. 3, lines 52-53). Gay used her internal conversation for completion of her Master's Degree and confirmation from others that has resulted in a course of action, achieving a headship. "There was no strategic leadership, I was desperate to make a strategic difference to the school" (p. 3, line 54). Internal conversation leading to direct action. Gay is a confident social actor (Archer, 2010).

The meta-reflexive potential aspirant

Meta-reflexive potential aspirants are values-oriented, contemplative and
highly committed to the teaching profession. The women who matched this
type most closely included both those who both aspired towards special
school headship and those who were uncertain as to their professional
futures. Meta-reflexive potential aspirants described teaching as a vocation
and saw self-fulfillment as being achieved through 'making a difference'
(Archer, 2007, p. 264). Prone to "self-interrogation" (Archer, 2003, p. 256),
they did not perceive their professional lives in monetary terms. Instead, they
were motivated to work towards a more democratic and just society. Meta-
reflexive potential aspirants, then, had rejected "the 'market' hegemony of
exchange relations over human relations" (Archer, 2007, p. 265). They
envisaged their professional futures as an opportunity to seek "a better fit
between who they seek to be and a social environment which permits
expression of it" (Archer, 2003, p. 259). Meta-reflexives aimed to achieve a

future working life that would be consistent with their person-centred values. The women tended to express a "willingness to pay the price" of any constraints or limitations they may encounter in order to achieve their ideals (Archer, 2003, p. 289). In this sense, meta-reflexive potential aspirants positioned themselves very differently towards structural forces and their own agentic capabilities than their more autonomous colleagues.

Table 11: *Participants characterised as meta-reflexive special school headteacher aspirants*

Meta-reflexive aspirant/values orientated	
Name	**Illustrative Quotations**
Amy	"My passion is working with children with particular autistic conditions" (p. 2, line 28). Amy holds person-centred values and will strive for success. "I came to my current special school as deputy head, I ended up acting up to support the school, the current head was on long-term sick leave" (p. 3, line 42). Amy was uncertain of her professional future, but values-orientated and highly committed. "The school presented challenging culture" (p. 5, line 83). "I decided to do my NPQH to support my leadership journey" (p. 3, line 53). Amy decided to make a difference by participating in the NPQH journey. Amy is demonstrating dominant modes of reflexivity (Archer, 2010).
Sally	"Working with children with mental health issues supported my aspiration to make a difference in the role of deputy head" (p. 3, lines 32-47). Sally is showing positive internal consequences for her pupils with external positive consequences for society (Archer, 2010). "I became headteacher and saw the opportunities to build good partnerships with the Local Authority, the vision and values was developed into satellite provisions" (p. 3, lines 53-59). Sally is critically reflexive about her own internal conversations and critical too about effective action in society, Sally is highly committed with person-centred values (Archer, 2010).

The communicative potential aspirant

Communicative potential aspirants are person-centred and relationship oriented. The women who matched this type most closely were uncertain about or had rejected the possibility of secondary headship. Communicative potential aspirants described their family and friends as their "ultimate

concern" (Archer, 2003, p. 169). They perceive human relations as "the most important aspect of employment, overriding considerations of pay, promotions and prospects" (Archer, 2007, p. 172). The pursuit of occupational advancement, status and power, then, was perceived to be secondary to the needs of their colleagues and students. These women tended to value "occupational continuity" (Archer, 2003, p. 168). They had worked at and/or aimed to stay at the same school for a sustained period of time. Communicative potential aspirants reported a 'thought and talk' pattern of reflexivity (Archer, 2007, p. 159). They described sharing and talking through their occupational dilemmas and concerns with trusted others i.e. family members and friends. Overall, the women described "modest" professional aspirations (Archer, 2007, p. 191). Their envisaged future professional selves were notably similar to their current occupational identities. Communicative potential aspirants reported having evaded both constraints and enablements throughout their careers in favour of maintaining a sense of continuity and social well-being.

Table 12: *Participants characterised as communicative special school headteacher aspirants*

Communicative aspirants/person-centred educators	
Name	**Illustrative Quotations**
Rachel	"I have enjoyed my leadership journey" (p. 1, line 3). Rachel's colleague's health and well-being are her primary concern – Rachel is person-centred and relationship orientated. "I have been deputy head for ten years in the same school" (p. 1, line 12). Rachel has contributed to the social stability and integration of the school, she has given contextual continuity and has supported the projects into the future (Archer, 2010). "I have been promoted quite young and the past thirteen years have not been without a struggle and at times isolating" (p. 2, line 32). Rachel displays a thought and talk pattern of reflexivity and is modest in her approach to leadership (Archer, 2010).
Jo	"My leadership journey was not a planned journey" (p. 1, line 7). Jo did not want headship initially, human relations are more important than pay and promotions. "The school had a new inexperienced headteacher, she had good intentions, but limited leadership expertise" (p. 2, lines 21-22). Status and power not Jo's concern instead human relations are more meaningful. "A very late in life decision and I thought, I don't like what is happening. I wanted to affect change, I wanted to be part of the leadership team to support the current headteacher" (p. 3, lines 33-34). Jo used her internal conversations that were required before taking action. Needed confirmation by others before resulting in a course of action (Archer, 2010). "So that was the start of my leadership journey, I took the position of temporary assistant head" (p. 41, line 40). Jo was thoughtful using a thought and talk pattern of reflexivity (Archer, 2010).

Summary

This chapter has explored and analysed the main findings and issues that arose from my analysis of six female special school headteachers' stories and experience of headship past, present and future. Three superordinate themes - managing constraint, motivating forces and perceptions of special school headship and the future - emerged from the IPA analytic process outlined in chapter 3. Having explored and analysed each theme, the data

revealed that the special school headteacher stories and experience of headship past, present and future had been shaped by both structural forces and their own agentic capacity to act and choose. The analysis presented in this chapter, however, highlighted a large degree of heterogeneity between participants; each individual woman described mediating and making sense of structural forces and her own agentic capacity to act in a different way.

Drawing on Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity as a heterogeneous and mediatory mechanism between structural forces and human agency, I proposed three distinct types of special school headteacher aspirant: (1) the autonomous potential aspirant (a strategic and decisive leader), (2) the meta-reflexive potential aspirant (a values-oriented professional) and (3) the communicative potential aspirant (a person-centred educator). Each one of these types reflects a different stance towards the constraints and enablements of both the teaching profession and society at large.

Summary of main findings

The superordinate themes that emerged from this study (i.e. 'managing constraint', 'motivating forces' and 'perceptions of special school headship and the future') illustrate the agentic actions and constraining encounters that have defined six women special school headteachers' experiences in special education. They paint a complex and multifaceted story of my participants' lived experiences. The themes reflect a group of agentic individuals who have consciously made their own unique way through their careers by carefully negotiating the constraints and affordances of their professional and personal lives.

Organised in accordance with my original research questions, the main findings of this study are summarised below.

Stories of female special school headteachers and their experience of headship.

Congruous with previous research (Coleman, 2002; Hall, 1996; McLay, 2008), the women in this study reported encountering both limiting and

facilitating influences on their special school headteacher experiences of their past, present and future professional selves. For instance, family obligations, workload, and the educational climate in England were perceived to have been key challenges to their special school headship past, present and future, while inspirational others, professional development opportunities and the drive to 'make a difference' were identified as motivating the group to pursue special headship positions. Yet, far from being passive victims of circumstance, the women perceived themselves to be autonomous decision makers who had actively made their way through the 'labyrinth' *(Eagly & Carli, 2007)* of their special school careers. In this study, then, it was not necessarily the constraints and enablements themselves that were of note, but rather the individual's unique perception and active negotiation of these factors.

Why do the participants decide to take their journey towards headship?

The contradictions and tensions of special school headship emerged from this study.

The women reported having to consciously negotiate the often conflicting and challenging demands of teaching and leading, dealing with the unpredictable and acting strategically as well as being accountable within the complexities of special school headship. Yet, despite the conflicts and challenges found to be ingrained within the position, the women spoke about special school headship in a way that suggested it was much more distilled and defined. The six special school headteachers' stories reflected passion and a moral imperative for special education.

The women seemed to have a clear role in the leadership of their schools. Alongside reflections on the role itself, the women also recalled the type of 'identity work' they felt they had needed to do whilst in the role of special school headteacher.

They reported having to intentionally craft a professional, embodied persona so as to be viewed as the main leader and accountable person towards the staff and student populations. By consciously engaging in impression

management (Goffman, 1959), the women sought to cultivate a certain leadership persona and hence legitimacy in the special school professional area.

Are there any challenges that women must navigate in their leadership journey?

This study found that the vast majority of the sample held dual, contradictory images of their journey and challenges to special school headship: one image consisted of a constraining and highly precarious role, while the other focused on the agentic capacity headteachers have to transform lives and communities. Interestingly, the six women reported that their faith in the power and opportunities of special school educational leadership had inspired them to overcome their reservations concerning special headship and pursue promotion regardless of the disincentives they perceived. It is notable however that the headteachers comments about the affordances of special headship were often expressed alongside and in conjunction with remarks concerning the risky existence of the special school headteacher. One participant has decided to leave the profession due to her husband's new job but does not intend to seek out a new special school headship position. This finding appears to imply that special school headteachers hold neither purely positive nor negative views of the position. The women's perceptions and impressions of the special school headteacher role therefore were complex and multi-layered.

How do women special headteachers see their leadership story developing?

The women's narratives showed evidence of considerable reflection, especially when contemplating their future special school career trajectories. The data suggests that far from being a mechanical process, the women's career decision-making had an affective and cognitive dimension. On the one hand, the women tended to exhibit a great deal of anxiety and hesitation. Although the intensity of these emotions varied between individuals mainly due to the complexity of special education, the ways in

which the women talked about their potential future selves highlighted the unpredictable, abstract and potentially constraining nature of their professional futures. On the other hand, the women spoke to varying extents about their agentic abilities to strategise and exercise choice when planning for the future in special education. Overall, the data revealed four distinct factors that had influenced and shaped the women's special school career decision-making for the future to varying degrees: (1) their self-perceptions and life projects, (2) the advice and expertise of their personal and professional communities, (3) their observations of and relationship with the policy climate in special education and (4) their values and beliefs.

The chapter that follows moves on to present poetic representations of each of my participants' stories of special school headteachers' experience of headship past, present and future. Each participant has read their individual poetic words of their special school headteacher story and has agreed to the true and meaningful representation.

CHAPTER 5: POETIC REPRESENTATIONS AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Writing is never innocent. Writing always inscribes.

(Richardson, 2001, p. 879)

Introduction

This chapter follows on from the previous chapter, which analysed the data using IPA. Here I present poetic representations of each of my participants' accounts. The chapter begins by reflecting on the challenges of capturing the complexities and idiosyncrasies of individual's experience of special school headship narratives within this thesis. While recognising the impossibility of presenting a full, researcher-free account of each participant's lived experiences, I argue that poetic representations are capable of honouring the emotionality, words and individuality of those I interviewed. With this in mind, I move on to present short poetic snapshots from each of my participants' career stories.

Doing justice to idiosyncrasy

The individual special school headteacher and the complex nuances of her lived experiences are at the heart of this project. Consequently, I aimed to report my findings in a way that honoured both the individuals who took part in this study and the idiosyncratic facets of their accounts. Yet, while writing this thesis, I was very mindful that the act of presenting my findings had the potential to obscure the more unique or extreme perspectives within the sample.

I chose to adopt an IPA approach to research with the aim of drawing out the exceptional as well as the mainstream. I hoped to arrive at the superordinate and subordinate themes required of an IPA analysis without side-lining participants' idiosyncratic or dissenting views. I intended, above all else, to avoid oversimplifying the complexity of my participants special school headteacher experiences and aspirations. As discussed in the previous chapter, the bulk of the IPA analytic process is "pitched at the idiographic

level" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 115). Yet, despite the person-centred nature of IPA, the process culminates (quite traditionally) in the emergence of overarching themes that are common across the entire or a subsection of the sample. The final 'product' of an IPA analysis (i.e. the superordinate and subordinate themes) does not explicitly honour the single case or account. Being cognisant of this, I wanted to create a space within this thesis devoted to individual narratives.

While recognising that social researchers have a "monopoly of interpretation" or "an exclusive privilege to interpret and report what the interviewee really meant" (Kvale, 2007, p. 15), I set about writing poetic representations of each of the women's narratives with the intention of preserving the women's own words as well as the complexity and idiosyncrasies of their special school headship stories. As I explored in the previous chapter, short poetic representations "concretise emotions, feelings and moods ... in order to recreate moments of experience" (Richardson, 2001, p. 880). They are capable of enhancing our understanding of the complex reality of working in special education (Cahnmann, 2003), and entering into the hermeneutic circle of phenomenological research (Shinebourne, 2012). The poetic representations I have created aim to present another layer of interpretation to the narratives recounted later in this thesis. Sparkes and Douglas (2007) argue that "poetic representations can provide the researcher, reader, and listener with a different and compelling lens through which to view the same scenery and, thereby, understand the data and themselves in alternative and more complex ways" (p. 172). My poetic portraits of each individual participant, then, aim to complement the superordinate and subordinate themes explored in the following chapter as well as to provide an additional lens through which to view my participants' accounts.

Poetic representations are, by their very nature, partial and incomplete. They cannot reflect the entirety of my participants' lived and imagined special school headship trajectories. The process of writing the poems was therefore reductionist in nature and decisions had to be made as to what to leave out of the final representations.

These decisions were made on a case by case basis, and inclusion was dictated by the events and experiences which appeared to be most salient for the individual participant. The final poems therefore present "a candid photo", collage or a rich episode of each woman's lived experiences, her sense-making and concerns (Richardson, 2001, p. 880). Rachel's poetic representation, for instance, highlights the ways in which she perceives her role, school and profession whilst caring for her own children, while Amy's illustrates her anxiety and tensions as she looks towards her personal and professional future. Interestingly, despite the diversity of these representations, within each of the poems it is possible to detect the interaction between agency and structure. Indeed, during their interviews, the women appeared to be acknowledging and making sense of the enabling and constraining forces that have shaped their unique special school headship experiences and aspirations. This is an idea that I discuss at length in the subsequent chapter. Demographic information for each participant can be found in the previous chapter. This information is a useful accompaniment to the reader's engagement with the six poetic representations below. As I noted in the previous chapter, I followed Richardson's (2001) approach to construct my poetic representations; I used my participants' own words and speech patterns, but the sequence of the material and the poetic devices employed within the poems are not necessarily faithful to the original transcript. This further highlights the approach I took to poetically represent my participants' accounts.

Gay's experience of special school headship: "Equality and Inclusion"

As a child I wanted equality
My sister's gifts and talents were recognised
My talents untapped
I became a musician
Ownership of my own learning
It gave me a desire to make a difference
to be a teacher
Seven-year career break for my children
My career break is central to my identity
I returned to teaching
Completed my Master's Degree
I became headteacher
Leading the way in SEND
I was the only female headteacher
Determined to make a difference
Conflict between self and educational culture
the "old boys club"
Made a difference to myself and others
Removed self-doubt
Resentment, professional jealousy
significant barriers
I was and I am determined
to be a great leader of special school education
I developed new SEND possibilities
Regionally and nationally
Challenging funding
Making a difference to the education of children with special needs

Gay's Reflection

Equality is an important part of my life and I strive to be inclusive.
My own talents emerged and becoming a musician set me up for my career in teaching.
Pupils with a learning difficulty can access music by using their senses so music is open to everyone.
I enjoyed my own children and it made me determined to make a difference for other children.
I broke through my own barriers to lead on SEND
I am proud of my OBE

Amy's experience of special school headship: "Tension"

Happy successful nursery nurse
good coaching and mentoring
Special move school by default
No burning ambition
Imposter syndrome
Passion for SEND and autism
I draw on my experience
Leadership through SEND
I lack self confidence
NPQH helpful
Giving leadership potential and growth
No system for supporting special school heads
Support for deputies patchy
Special heads support each other
Exposes importance of peer to peer support
Special leaders deal with complexity
Tension between self, funding and culture
Tough journey tried to cope
Challenging culture
School requires improvement
Perceives journey to be tough and challenging
turbulent staff
Difficult conversations
nervous and frightened
Challenges unsettling
I recognise the need for authentic leadership
Varied leadership styles are needed
Authentic leadership supports a change in culture

Amy's Reflection

I am proud of my nursery nurse career
Headship was not for me initially
My imposter syndrome has always got in the way
I have used my passion for SEND to grow my leadership
NPQH has helped as I have navigated through difficult conversations
A challenging culture has changed the provision for the better

Sally's experience of special school leadership: "Changing Landscape"

Headship was not on my agenda
Opportunities gave confidence
I moved school for a different experience
A positive move into leadership
Mental health and education interesting
I grasped learning opportunities
Use learning from psychology
leadership journey was an epiphany
I was creative and aspirational
I had ownership of my leadership
Developed and expanded a provision with the Local Authority
Building and enabling positive relationships
Gained a new headship during a recruitment crisis
Exposed leadership barriers in new headship
My new school was challenging
I couldn't cope
I reflected on positive aspirant leadership
Identified value based leadership
Promoted great team work
Hostility and challenge remained evident
Ownership of leadership ability became difficult
I sensed professional jealousy
Academy journey exposed for consultation
Barriers became evident with undermining staff
Perceived undermining games, affecting team work
Diminishing school improvement and partnership work
Questioned own ability and leadership style

Sally's Reflection

I wasn't aspirant for headship in special education
A positive move into leadership led to my interest in mental health
I am creative and aspirational and have built strong relationships with others
The politics of academisation has made me realise that as a leader,
you need to understand the culture of the school and its community
Reflecting on my practice as a leader and
being a good communicator has supported my leadership journey

Jo's experience of special school headship: "Unplanned Headship Journey"

Happy successful teaching career
Internally motivated
Created and embrace change
Moved from mainstream into special education
My experience was vast
I was non-aspirant
Staff became hostile under current leadership
Meaningful components of my identity
I started to become aspirant
I wanted to affect change
supported current headteacher
The start of my leadership journey
School was falling apart
A sense of self-identity
My coping skills were strong
Leadership team became non-existent
I stepped up to the plate
a variety of leadership positions
My leadership journey became chequered
Current headship became broken
Relationships were frayed
Funding was poor
Current headteacher resigned
I started to lead the school
School in "Requires improvement"
Power of OFSTED
Self-belief in own abilities led the school from
"Requires Improvement"
to "Good"

Jo's Reflection

I have loved my teaching career, I enjoy positive change
I have seen staff hostility, at times I thought the school was falling apart
I stepped up and pulled up my big knickers and started to lead the school
I had the staff, pupils and parents behind me every step of the way
It's been a tough job moving from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Good'
We did it!

Carmel's experience of special school headship:
"Constructing new meaning"

Meaningful special education career
Dedication in my role
Enjoy teaching leading and caring
Close to my sense of self
Unexpected learning by doing meaningful events
Developing links and finding new opportunities
Value career in special education
Humanistic approach to leadership
knowledge and understanding of leadership role
I started to construct a new leadership identity
I wanted more challenge
Changing educational landscape
rapid change
new headship position
self-doubt and low confidence
I was my own barrier
Scared of high levels of accountability
Lost an opportunity with regret
I regained my confidence
Leadership journey started positively
It has become harder
I applied for two special headships
knocked back
It has been hard getting back up
Finding a new sense of direction
It's been difficult
Unexpected knocks to ego, confidence and self-belief

Carmel's Reflection
For many years I have enjoyed my career in special education
Working as lead for inclusion was the start of my leadership path
Moving to an assistant headteacher position, then deputy was great
I started to shape and influence the quality of SEND
Sadly, my leadership journey took a u-turn and it became difficult
It left me feeling disillusioned
Recently I have become agentic and my confidence and self-belief,
is starting to come back

Rachel's experience of special school headship: "It just happened"

I learnt how to be good teacher
Learning to lead
I was a deputy for ten years
headteacher for three
Previous head showed the ropes
I am a young headteacher
Juggling my own children has been difficult
Professional jealousy
Leadership is lonely
I did not want headship
I am non-aspirant
The position difficult to fill
I applied for flexible working hours
Children and headship doesn't work
A loyal deputy
and an
authentic leadership style has helped me a lot
I enjoyed my NPQH
Want to be a strong leader
Men have it easy
Always navigating challenges
No childcare for men
It's not the same for everyone

Rachel's Reflection

I am a good teacher and I moved into leadership early into my career
I do think that I have stayed in the same school for too long.
I have completed my NPQH,
but feel that I have missed out on important aspects of my learning
Leadership at times has been lonely
I should have had some coaching and mentoring
I have found having young children and headship really difficult
Late meetings and safeguarding issues have been hard for me
I wish I had waited until my children were older
or asked for more support

My Reflexive response to participants' words

Poetry, in research, takes the existence of truths within attitudes, feelings, or ideas (Harman, 2011). According to Ratner (2002) poetry can be used when researchers respect the participant's reality and are able to accurately comprehend stories. Additionally, researchers should have an awareness of poetic traditions and possess an ability to discuss how poetry provides an opportunity to: (1) present research findings that may otherwise go unnoticed and (2) gain a new perspective to the researcher (McCullis, 2013; Sparkes, 2008).

The representation of poetic words in this thesis were derived from the stories of six female special school headteachers and their experience of headship. I re-read the transcripts and themes emerged for each participant. Each participant was given the opportunity to read and reflect on their individual poetic representation of their special school story.

My participant's words are poetic and take on the existence of truth within attitudes, feelings and ideas, (Harman, 2011). Gay's poetic reflections determine *"equality, a sense of self, talent and determination to succeed in special education"*. Gay reflects on her national achievement gaining her OBE for national services to education. The themes addressed by Gay in her reflection are picked up in Archer's (2012) reflective imperative, Archer argues that society is currently being rapidly re-shaped and distanced from modernity. She highlights a new global realm of "*opportunities*", as well as enhanced migration, increased education and a proliferation of novel skills, not to mention the changing nature of reflexivity itself. Archer's reflections suggest a move away from communicative reflexivity, which is associated with traditionalism and a move towards autonomous reflexivity, which is apt and ripe for global opportunities, with meta-reflexivity producing patrons of a new civil society expressive of human values, (Archer, 2012). Amy is proud and has a "*passion for SEND*", she has navigated difficult conversations to become an authentic leader and headteacher. Sally's SEND headship experience is "*creative and aspirational*", has the realisation that it is important to understand the school culture and context. Jo states she has embraced change and has experienced hostility and at times felt that the

school "*was falling apart*". Archer (2012) says the reflexivity of some becomes "fractured" as a consequence, the fractured reflexives are those whose "internal conversations" intensify their distress and disorientation rather than leading purposeful course of action. According to Archer (2012) it is the communicative reflexives that are the most fragile and vulnerable to displacement, (Archer, 2012). This is not the case for Jo although she has experienced hostility and felt the world was falling apart, she did say "*it has been tough"*, and together they have moved the school from '*Requires Improvement' to 'Good*'. Carmel has experienced a "*meaningful"* special education career and has been able to shape inclusion in her school. Her headship journey became difficult, it left her feeling "*disillusioned"*. Carmel said she did "*become more agentic*" and regained her confidence. Rachel thinks she has stayed at the same school for too long, enjoying her NPQH but "*I could have developed myself further*". Archer (2012) describes this as meta-reflexive, meaning immune from rewards linked to enablements and the forfeits associated with constraints, (Archer, 2012). Rachel is reflexive and expresses her feelings when she says she has found having young children and headship "*difficult"*.

Summary

This chapter has presented six poetic representations, one for each of the special school headteachers I interviewed. While acknowledging the active role of the researcher in constructing poetic representations, I aimed to offer poetic snapshots of my participants' lived experiences, perceptions and sense-making through the reflections of my participant's poetic words and also my own reflexivity.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

We make our way through the world by using the human power of reflexivity.

(Archer, 2007, p. 315)

Introduction

Drawing on Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity as an intercessor between structural forces and human agency, this thesis has proposed three types of special school headteacher aspirant: 'the strategic and decisive leader', 'the values-orientated professional' and 'the person-centred educator'. These ideal types illustrate the heterogeneous ways in which a small sample of women special school headteachers had reflected on, positioned themselves towards and navigated their way through the career challenges in special education. This typology together with the nuanced analysis advanced throughout this thesis has offered a unique contribution to knowledge.
I have considered the ways in which my participants had experienced their special school headship and the challenges that women have navigated during their special school headship journey. The themes that emerged from my analysis highlighted the heterogeneity that exists between women special school leaders, the perceived affordances and precarity of special school headship as well as the mediatory role that reflexive, 'internal conversations' play in helping individuals to make sense of their professional lives and experiences (Archer, 2007, p. 4). My participants revealed elements in their stories of female special school headship, a role that consisted of risk, performativity, (Ball, 2013) and difficult conversations, some participants said they had lost confidence in the role and would have liked more coaching and mentoring. Other participants stated an increase in their agentic capacity and recognised the power of making a meaningful difference to the lives of young people with a learning difficulty.

This concluding chapter consists of a series of reflections. It begins by revisiting the key insights that arose from the study reported on in this thesis. I then identify the originality of my research, and consider the practical and theoretical implications of my findings. Having made some recommendations

for policy and practice, I then move on to reflect on the limitations of the project. Finally, I propose avenues for further research and reflect on what I have learnt as a doctoral researcher.

Reflecting on my findings

This study was undertaken to explore the stories and the lived experiences and perceptions of female special school headteachers. It aimed to explore the ways in which six female special school headteachers, told their stories about their experience of headship and the challenges that the women have navigated throughout their leadership journey. The study also sought to gain an insight into participants' special school headteacher stories and how these had informed their professional aspirations for the future. With these aims in mind, I posed the following research questions:

1. Why do the participants decide to take their journey towards headship?
2. Are there any challenges that women must navigate in their leadership journey?
3. How do women special headteachers see their leadership story developing?

Why do the participants decide to take their journey towards headship?

The stories of special school headteachers in this research has revealed the structural challenges, accountabilities and expected progression that headteachers work towards within their personal and professional lives. This analysis has not been shared previously and gives an insight into the pressures that special school headteachers face.

The special school headteachers in my study wanted to become headteachers as they had a desire to make a difference to the education of young people with a learning difficulty. One participant said they had their own SEND leadership identity to develop opportunities for other headteachers to lead effectively. Another headteacher said, there were

potential enabling factors that would lead to working with talented teachers, distributing the leadership grows leaders and systems for the future. Other headteachers echoed, they were talented teachers and wanted to bring the talent to others using the influence of leadership.

Are there any challenges that women must navigate in their leadership journey?

Individual structural challenges have been identified in the women's stories, this is evident when balancing the constraints of family responsibilities and childcare issues. The stories that give notions of the challenges experienced by the women special school headteachers are varied and different and no two are the same demonstrating the diverges and converges within the stories. The challenges experienced have enabled the women to become authentic and loyal leaders, which is the opposite to the heroic model of leadership often shown by their male counterparts.

The headteachers in this study have navigated challenges such as the experience of weak leadership from others and conflict between self and the educational culture. Two of the participants explained the professional jealousy and resentment experienced from male colleagues behaviour. One headteacher was explicit when she discussed the break through "the old boys club" and removed self-doubt from other women leaders, as she had broken through significant barriers, determined to be a good leader in SEND education. One headteacher in particular said, the role of headteacher in her school was tough and a challenging culture where difficult conversations were common place.

How do women special headteachers see their leadership story developing?

Some of the women's stories have reflected the overcoming of significant barriers to become national leaders of education by championing special education regionally and nationally. Evidence gleaned from the stories has

demonstrated the growth of resilience showing an increase in motivation to take them one step further on their individual leadership journeys.

In some of the participants' special school headteacher stories, the structural factors have supported the development of agency enabling the headteachers to become more agentic. The stories are useful learning, coaching and mentoring tools that can be used by future leaders in a special school context. Special school leadership is complex and requires a high level of leadership skill and this evidence can be used to inform universities and Teaching School Alliances with a SCITT, the importance of training and developing trainee teachers in special education.

The headteachers stories revealed the importance on moving on and shaping their future. One participant said some of the challenges faced by a special school headteacher expose the importance of leadership training to support leadership and management of complex schools such as special schools. Another headteacher highlighted being an authentic leader supports a change in culture. Self-belief in own abilities has been stated by the majority of the women in the study as being the essence for developing special school headship. One participant said to grow leadership in complex settings, demonstrates the need for motivated leaders to affect the management of change. One headteacher outlined that difficult challenges enable women to navigate their leadership journey to develop new possibilities.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has been used in this research to explore the phenomenon of female special school headteachers' experience of headship. Three superordinate themes were identified: (1) managing constraint, (2) motivating forces and (3) perceptions of special school headship and the future. These superordinate themes along with their accompanying subordinate themes are discussed at length in the previous chapters. The reflection below focuses on the key insights that emerged across the studies themes, namely those concerned with heterogeneity, risk and reflection.

Heterogeneity

While analysing the sense that my participants had made of their special school headship stories and experience of headship, I noted various commonalities between their accounts.

Consonant with existing literature on gendered educational leadership (see, for example, Cunneen & Harford, 2016), all of my participants perceived their special school leader experiences to have been shaped by a number of constraining and enabling influences both on their journeys to and while fulfilling the role of special school headteacher. Furthermore, all of the women in the sample had invested a great deal, both personally and professionally, in their special school career advancement, the young people they taught and the communities they served. Yet, as this study progressed, I became increasingly aware of the nuanced divergences that existed between my participants, their perceptions and motivations.

"*I created a better life for my children moving into special school leadership*" (Gay, p. 5, line 105).

"*Good coaching and mentoring has given me more balance for my health and well-being, when leading in a tough special school environment*" (Jo, p. 11, line 183).

"*Exposes the importance of peer to peer support for special school leaders*" (Amy, p. 5, line 56).

The headteachers' comments are of significance and demonstrate the fact that special school leadership is complex, and coaching, mentoring and peer to peer support are important factors that determine successful special school headship.

Far from a homogeneous group who had experienced and made sense of occupational constraints, enablers and possibilities in identical ways, my sample was made up of individual women whose idiosyncratic lenses had helped them to uniquely navigate and position themselves in the social world.

As I pointed out in the previous chapters and within this conclusion, the women had perceived and experienced their responsibilities to dependents, the affordances and challenges of special school headship, and the pressures of workload and accountability very differently. It is evident from the special school headteacher stories that their leadership experiences are complex due to the special educational need aspect and the legalities of the SEND Code of Practice (2014). The experiences are therefore different to that of a mainstream headteacher. All of the participants in this study outline the need for training development and coaching and mentoring as an important aspect for aspirant leaders working in a special educational need context. In addition, the female special school headteacher stories all share the same theme of wanting more coaching for women special school leaders due to the complexities of the role and the lack of female headteachers in the special school sector.

Amy captures the themes by stating *"I draw strength from other leaders by sharing successes and insecurities. I realise there was no system for supporting special school headteachers when it is the most complex of headteacher roles in the education sector"* (Amy, p. 3, line 59).

As discussed in the literature review of this thesis, it is commonly assumed that all school leaders aspire towards headship (Harris et al., 2003, p. 9). This assumption suggests that headteachers are a homogeneous or monolithic group with the same life projects, values and professional priorities. The findings of this IPA study, however, do not support this view of potential headteacher aspirants.

While one out of six of the women who participated in this study had decided to pursue special headship, I found there to be little uniformity in the feelings individual women espoused towards the headteacher role, or the influence these feelings appeared to exert on their plans for the future. For instance, Gay's and Rachel's professional aspirations and feelings towards the role were clouded by concerns about age either older or younger respectively, while Amy's professional future hinged on her finding a headship that was congruent with what she perceived to be *her "urbanised"* leadership identity

(Amy, p. 5, line 189).

The data revealed that the women's professional aspirations and envisaged future selves were laced with nuances and idiosyncrasies. In writing this thesis, I have attempted to avoid oversimplifying this complexity. I've tried to make sense of dissenting experiences and perceptions as opposed to papering over them. Like the under-representation of women in special school headship, women special school headteacher stories and professional aspirations are a complex phenomenon.

Risk

When I started this study, I did not anticipate that I would encounter simultaneously held, contradictory perceptions of the special school headteacher role. Yet, as this study has progressed, I became increasingly alert to the fluid and prism-like nature of the women's lifeworlds which had enabled them to see a whole spectrum of future possibilities, both constraining and enabling. The women's narratives revealed that their understanding of and relationship to special school headship was multifaceted and highly complex. Consistent with various studies concerned with the importance of high-quality educational leadership (see, for example, Leithwood et al., 2004), participants spoke about the positive influence that headteachers can exert on students' learning and life chances, especially in schools in difficult circumstances. The special school headteachers in the sample tended to contrast the capacity that special school headteachers have to take positive action with their own perceived inability to act independently and autonomously as headteachers. They sought the increased sense of agency, choice and power they saw as accompanying special school headship. Yet, while some of the women who took part in this study had at some point aspired towards headship, all participants reflected on the risks and precariousness of applying for and taking on a vacant headship post in a rapidly changing and high stakes educational culture. The women spoke about the increasing accountability and 'greedy' workloads headteachers have to navigate as well as the unpredictable nature of England's educational policy climate. These impressions are in keeping with those reported in the research

literature concerned with headteacher succession and recruitment in England (Bush, 2015; The Future Leaders Trust, 2016; NCSL, 2007; Thomson et al., 2003). In short, headship was seen as a more precarious career move than any they had taken before.

As I explored in the previous chapters, all of the special school headteachers believed headship to pose a greater threat to their occupational stability and reputation than deputy headship. Amy states, *"I don't want to walk into school one day and not have a job anymore"* (Amy, p. 4, line 78) and *"headship could ruin a lot of people, both professionally and personally"* (Sally, p. 4, line 94). For the most part, the constraining and punitive power of Ofsted was perceived to be the primary source of this threat. The women aligned the public nature of a negative Ofsted report with personal risk and loss. The fears expressed by these headteachers are echoed in the experiences of existing headteachers reported in the literature. MacBeath found that: Among heads who had been subject to recent inspection, some spoke in interviews of their resentment at their professional judgement being questioned and questioned so publicly. "Tension" and "anxiety" were common epithets but there was also stronger language by a few who used words such as "fear", "trauma" and "public humiliation".

In the previous chapter, I noted that the majority of my participants were working in 'challenging' and specialist professional contexts located in low income communities at the time of interview. Those who said they explicitly enjoyed leading in challenging schools indicated that they hoped to lead similar schools. Yet, for some of the headteachers in the sample their future plans were marred with the realisation that these posts may be significantly more precarious than those in other, less challenging circumstances.

Amy, for instance, remarked:

> *"I'm not sure I want to take on a really heavy school with real behaviour issues that's in real special measures. I think you need your second headships for those sorts of things"* (Amy, p. 5, line 136).

Likewise, Carmel reported:

"In the past whilst being a deputy head, I looked at a school that was completely inadequate and I think that would have been too much for a first headship" (Carmel, p. 4, line 106).

Both extracts reveal undercurrents of risk and anxiety. They reveal the desire to protect oneself from the negative repercussions and damaging consequences of being a head who fails to improve a school in "special measures". Perryman (2006) observes, Ofsted's inspection framework assumes that "all schools can follow the same recipe for success, and any deviation from this norm can be an indicator that a school is failing" (p. 150). Yet, by discounting the influence of contextual factors such as socio-economic background on students' attainment and taking a 'one size fits all' approach, Ofsted's inspection regime ensures that some headteacher posts are perceived as riskier career moves than others. Impressions such as these on the part of potential headteacher aspirants could, as Courtney (2013) observes, "have consequences for headteacher recruitment and retention in such schools, and for social justice for their pupils" (p. 168).

For the six women in the sample, their belief in the power of special educational leadership to transform lives and communities had motivated them to aspire towards and pursue or accept headship posts. The data however, shows that these aspirations were not formed in the absence of doubts and anxieties concerning the precarity of the role, but in spite of them. In the previous chapter, I speculated that risk taking may be a part of agentic educational leadership in the current policy climate. Indeed, Howson (2016) argues that "grappling with uncertainty is at the core of all leadership. Successful leaders prepare for this fact and manage the consequences" (cited in The Future Leaders Trust, 2016, p. 5).

The women in this study reported having to negotiate potential risk, exposedness and doubt while making a decision about their professional futures. They recognised the need for a risk-tolerant outlook and calculated risk taking when they stepped up to special school headship.

Reflection

Smith et al. (2009) note that "when people are engaged with 'an experience' of something major in their lives", such as contemplating a significant career move, "they begin to reflect on the significance of what is happening" (p. 3.). My participants' accounts revealed the considerable reflection prompted by the decision as to whether or not to aspire towards and apply for special school headship.

The idiographic nature of IPA permitted an in-depth analysis of women special school headteacher reflections and feelings as they made sense of what it was to be a headteacher, and questioned the extent to which the role was compatible with their values, professional identities and life projects. Archer (2007) argues that introspective, reflexive deliberations, such as those my participants were engaged in as they contemplated their special school headship experiences and aspirations, "form the basis upon which people determine their future courses of action" and make their way through the world (pp. 4-5). As I noted in Chapter 2, Archer defines 'reflexivity' as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" *(*p. 4). She argues that reflexivity is exercised through 'internal conversations', an inner dialogue in which we deliberate about ourselves, our values, goals and relationship to the social world (Archer, 2003; Archer, 2007).

In the previous chapters, I utilised Archer's theory of reflexivity to propose an analytic tool through which to make sense of special school headteachers' perceptions and experiences. Through the lens of Archer's work, three types of special school headteacher aspirant emerged: (1) the autonomous potential aspirant or the strategic and decisive leader, (2) the meta-reflexive potential aspirant or values-oriented professional and (3) the communicative potential aspirant or person-centred educator. These ideal types demonstrated different 'stances' towards the constraining and enabling effects of special school headship and career advancement, as well as different ways of reflecting on one's career journey. They also served to illustrate the heterogeneous ways in which a small sample of women special heads reflected on, positioned

themselves towards and navigated their way through their careers in special education.

While conducting this study, I became increasingly alert to the benefits of storytelling and having the space to critically reflect on our lived experiences, perceptions and sense-making, especially at a time of transition or when the future appears unclear. One participant remarked that she had found it *"really thought provoking"* reflecting on her special school career while being interviewed (Gay, personal correspondence, January 2019). Goodson and Sikes (2001) note various benefits of interviewing techniques which encourage participants to explore their life stories and career histories. They argue that this process can lead to "improved self-knowledge" and insights into "how our past might influence our present and our future" (p. 73). The authors also note that "taking some time to step back and examine and appraise what we are doing and why, frequently has positive consequences for practice and attitude" *(*p. 73). Goodson and Sikes' observations highlight the importance of introspection and deliberation. This seems particularly important when contemplating future special school headteacher career trajectories, and deciding whether or not to climb the next rung of the career ladder.

The subordinate theme 'balancing work and well-being' focused on the time pressures, 'greedy' workloads and stringent accountability regimes the women reported having to negotiate in their professional lives. Participants described continual activity, and an inability to *"switch off"* from work-related issues (see, for example, Sally, p.9, line 178). Looking at the data as a whole, there appears to be a stark disconnect between the quiet, contemplative reflection the women appeared to require to make sense of and plan for their professional futures, and the continual activity and change characterising both individual special schools and the wider educational climate. I wondered to what extent it was possible that the changing nature of their working lives was impeding the introspection, deliberation and critical reflection required to plan their future career trajectories.

As I pointed out previously, Amy remarked:

"I think sometimes in the midst of trying to get all the work done, and trying to get everything ticked off my to do list every day, I forget the bigger picture - my career development" (Amy, p. 5, line 138).

Her words suggest that special headteacher aspirants (male and female) require more space and more time to make careful, considered decisions about their professional futures. The chance to engage in internal conversation is required before deciding to aspire towards and apply for what is a highly influential yet publicly accountable role.

Having reflected on the key insights that emerged across the studies themes, I will now move on to discuss the originality of the study.

Reflecting on my contribution to knowledge

While my findings complement those of existing studies such as Guihen, (2017) *The two faces of secondary headship: Women deputy headteachers' perceptions of the secondary headteacher role* and Smith (2011) *Aspirations to and perceptions of secondary headship: contrasting female teachers' and headteachers' perspectives*. This research project makes four key contributions to the literature on gender and special school educational leadership. Firstly, the findings presented in this thesis enhance our understanding of the special school headteachers stories and experience of headship and the challenges that special school headteacher have to navigate in their individual leadership journey.

My research focuses exclusively on special school headteachers. As I noted in Chapter 2, deputy headteachers are an under-researched group compared to headteacher counterparts (Harris et al., 2003; Harvey, 1994; Lee et al., 2009; Ribbins, 1997). It should be noted that the under-representation of female special deputy and headteachers has not been researched to date. The present study, then, should prove valuable to those researching this professional group of special school leaders in the future. Secondly, the study makes a methodological contribution.

As I noted in the research design chapter of this thesis, IPA is not commonly

used by those working in the field of gender and special educational leadership. This study has gone some way towards illustrating the utility of the approach for those researching female special school headteacher leadership experience of past, present and future, and arguing for IPA's inclusion in the repertoire of methods used to research gender issues in educational leadership. Thirdly, the idiographic analysis advanced throughout this thesis demonstrates the individuality, idiosyncrasy and heterogeneity present within a small sample of special school headteachers.

This points to the possible dangers of treating the potential pool of headteacher candidates as a homogeneous group with the same motivations, perceptions and goals. It suggests that more nuanced, individualised approaches to dealing with the under-representation of women in special school headship (and headteacher recruitment challenges more generally) may be needed. Fourthly, utilising Archer's (2003, 2007, 2012) theory of reflexivity, this study provides an analytical tool for the exploration of female special school headteacher perceptions, lived experiences, challenges and occupational aspirations.

It offers the potential for new insights into the motivations, values and decision-making of senior women leaders, as well as the diverse ways in which they navigate and make sense of the constraints and enabling influences in the teaching profession and wider society.

Reflecting on the implications of the study

Throughout this thesis, I have aimed to explore the nuances of individual special school participants' stories and experience of headship past, present and future. The complexity and idiosyncrasy of the findings examined within its pages are not a suitable foundation on which to make wide-ranging policy recommendations or propose definitive solutions that will ensure the equal representation of women in special school headship.

The implications explored below, then, are tentative in nature. They are not intended to be simplistic or 'one size fits all' solutions. It is anticipated, however, that the implications of this study may be of interest for potential and

current headteachers in all school phases and those involved in developing and recruiting senior women aspirants and existing leaders, as well as those engaged in educational policy making.

Implications for potential special school headteacher aspirants

Alongside talk of the potential constraints they may encounter in the future, the women who participated in this study spoke of their agentic capacity to make decisions about their future special school career trajectories.

They reported using their own agentic capacity to make professional choices. This suggests, as Smith (2011) points out, that "women do exercise personal agency, make choices (albeit within certain constraints), negotiate barriers and resist the factors limiting their freedom" (p. 22). This finding has important implications for individual women and the ways in which they make sense of themselves and their careers. Although structural and cultural forces such as governmental policies limit our autonomy to a certain extent, individual women are the authors of their own career stories. Both aspirants and non-aspirants shape their own narratives. This is an inspiring thought. By recognising and celebrating their own capacity for agency and choice in the professional arena, individuals can become empowered to believe in their own ability to take charge of their professional futures. Furthermore, in becoming conscious of their own capacity to act, aspiring women leaders can be encouraged to take proactive steps such as career planning, networking and seeking an appropriate mentor.

Implications for existing special school headteachers

IPA encourages the researcher to consider the ways in which individuals negotiate the social, cultural and historical circumstances in which they find themselves (Smith et al., 2009). The individuals who took part in this study were situated in very particular organisational contexts, some of which were described as being more gender equitable than others.

Existing headteacher governing bodies and other decision makers such as academy sponsors have a key part to play in creating more gender equitable

school cultures. This may be done by making a conscious effort to ensure that both men and women are considered for all mentoring and career opportunities, as well as guaranteeing that all those involved in staff recruitment have undertaken rigorous "equal opportunities training" (Coleman, 2002, p. 48). It is a statutory requirement for school and academy governors and leadership teams tasked with school recruitment responsibility to undertake and keep up to date with safer recruitment training.

Steps such as these would help to ensure that women entering the profession as well as those with more experience are sent the message that senior leadership posts are attainable, Showuni (2016) advises that "one way in which the ethos of an organisation might be changed is through having a focus on equality/diversity/social justice at the heart of ongoing professional development" (p. 77). Indeed, courses and mentoring schemes aimed at supporting and promoting the career development of all are essential if we are to create truly equitable schools.

Being a special school headteacher had allowed the women who took part in this study to observe, work closely with and, crucially, question the decisions of the headteachers they worked for previously. As individuals who had invested heavily in their careers in order to work their way up the occupational hierarchy, the decision as to whether or not to pursue special school headship had enormous consequences. It had the potential to have a profound impact on their sense of self and life course. Making this decision and potentially being on the cusp of real professional change appeared to create a meaningful reality that participants were experiencing and trying to make sense of. Unsurprisingly, then, the women's narratives were highly reflective. Yet, as I explored above, the women's talk of their future selves and the importance of making a careful, considered decision were juxtaposed with talk of the 'greedy', all-encompassing nature of special school headship.

This suggested that women's professional lives left little time for the reflection and evaluation required to formulate future career plans. This finding appears to suggest that the special school headteacher experience could be usefully enriched by providing special heads with the time and space to consider their

future career options and formulate aspirations accordingly. Existing executive heads and CEO's may facilitate this process by allocating and protecting time for special headteachers to consider and plan for their professional futures. This may help to create a school culture in which career aspirations, planning and anxieties are openly discussed among staff in a special school context.

Implications for leadership development programmes

Throughout this thesis, I have argued for a more nuanced analysis of women's professional lives that takes into account the divergences as well as the commonalities that exist among individuals. Indeed, my findings highlight the differences that existed between my participants' special school headship experiences past and present and future. The variations between the women special school headteachers in my sample suggest that a simple, 'one size fits all' approach to identifying, training and supporting aspiring women leaders may be insufficient.

My findings appear to support the argument for more individualised, bespoke leadership development programmes that take into account the diverse motivations, values and life projects of special school headteacher and existing executive headteacher aspirants in a special school context.

Throughout my study, I became acutely aware that many of the women special heads in my sample perceived headship to be a highly risky endeavour. As I reported in the previous chapter, participants' concerns stemmed from their beliefs about the precarity of special headship in the current educational climate, and the likelihood that being a headteacher may involve skills they felt themselves lacking.

Ensuring appropriate and targeted support for potential special headteacher and executive headteacher aspirants that addresses individual's anxieties may therefore be a useful priority for those tasked with identifying and training future special school senior leaders. As MacBeath et al. (2009) remark, such anxieties "could be addressed through improved guidance, support, CPD and exemplar practice in strategic and personnel leadership" (p. 56).

Implications for policy makers

Taken together, the womens' accounts suggested that the rapidly changing nature of the educational culture in England was hindering their ability to formulate career plans for the future. It may, therefore, be useful for policy makers to consider slowing or relaxing the pace of educational policy change. This would give potential aspirants the time and mental space to self-evaluate, consider their career options and take the steps required to pursue career advancement and address the under-representation of women special school headteachers.

It was striking that, while exploring the stories of special school headteachers, the women spoke about the professional and public spheres of their lives alongside and in conjunction with one another. Their work as special school headteachers had clearly had an impact on their home lives (and vice versa). Perhaps not surprisingly, caring responsibilities were found to be one of the most prominent factors constraining women's career choices. In the previous chapters, I noted that the women positioned themselves towards and managed these roles and responsibilities differently. It was, however, striking that all of the home-family arrangements referred to were accompanied by references to one parent or carer (male or female) having to make sacrifices in the professional domain. It seems, as Connolly et al. (2016) point out, that "British societal infrastructure still tends to promote and support a full-time breadwinner plus part-time carer model" (p. 16). The author's claim this is "slowing adjustment to the gender revolution" (p. 16). For the women who participated in this study, the decision to become a caregiver was not divorced from their professional lives and experiences; caring responsibilities were perceived to have influenced their career decision-making in the past, and were reported to be informing, to varying extents, their professional aspirations and career plans for the future. Consequently, it seems that if we are to encourage more women (and men) to take on the challenge of special school headship, government policy makers need to respect our caring roles and responsibilities, and build more flexibility into organisational and societal structures to ensure individuals can strike a workable balance between their

professional and private lives (Coleman, 2002, p. 158). This may take the form of additional professional and emotional support for women and men returning from maternity/paternity leave and those caring for young children. This would help those with parenting and other caring responsibilities feel supported to achieve their career goals.

To summarise, the implications outlined above advocate increased collegiality, support and solidarity in the teaching profession, both at national and local levels. I firmly believe that initiatives aimed at addressing recruitment and equality issues at the special school headteacher level should not be done to potential aspirants, but rather in collaboration with and in response to the views of potential special school headteacher aspirants. It is only by truly valuing and listening to the voices of individuals that the perceived disincentives of headship for women (and men) may be addressed.

Reflecting on the limitations of the study

This study aimed to better our understanding of the stories and experience of women special school headteachers past, present and future aspirations and the challenges that women navigate throughout their leadership journey. The findings and discussion presented in this thesis provide various insights into the stories of six special school headteachers. Like all research projects, however, this study suffers from a number of limitations. In Chapter 3, I explored the conceptual and practical limitations of IPA as a methodological approach. This discussion included consideration of the role of language in IPA, the analytical guidelines provided by the IPA community and IPA researchers' use of the term "cognition". What follows is an extension of this discussion. In the section below, I reflect on the potential weaknesses of the study and what I would do differently if I were to undertake this project again.

The IPA research presented in this thesis is idiographic in nature, and is based on a small, homogeneous sample of six. Since the study was limited to the sense-making and lifeworlds of such a small group of individuals, it is not possible to make general claims about the career decision-making of all women leaders (Langdridge, 2007). The studies scope may, therefore, be

perceived to be a significant limitation. In presenting my research, however, I am not claiming that the women who participated in this study are typical of all special school headteachers. The study was, after all, small scale, idiographic and exploratory. It was conducted in a very particular social, educational and policy climate with individuals who had experienced, made sense of and interpreted their professional lives very differently. Moreover, as Kvale (2007) states, the qualitative interview is "a construction site of knowledge" (p. 21). The meanings and experiences explored are constituted and co-constructed by interviewer and interviewee. It is not possible to claim, therefore, that the accounts captured in this thesis are 'true' or that their content would not change in different circumstances, or in the presence of a different doctoral researcher.

While the idiosyncratic nature of the experiences, meanings and interpretations discussed in this thesis mean that universal and general claims are not possible. I would like to reiterate an earlier point. In the research design chapter of this thesis, I cite Smith et al. (2009) who argue that "the particular and the general are not so distinct" (p. 31). They argue that in representing specific individual's perceptions of the particular phenomenon under investigation, IPA researchers provide their readers with an opportunity to consider the commonalities they share with the interviewee and, in turn, the universality of the experiences being claimed. Storytelling and the inclusion of idiosyncratic yet richly detailed narratives in a body of literature, then, provides an important sense-making function. They help us to better understand and make sense of our own experiences.

As discussed in Chapter 3, a major weakness of this study is that it is limited to the perceptions and lived experiences of white, heterosexual women. Consequently, the extent to which other identities influence the career experiences and professional aspirations of women special school headteachers remains unknown.

While IPA research requires a relatively homogeneous sample (Smith et al., 2009), women headteachers in England occupy a range of demographic characteristics not represented in the qualitative data I collected. In this thesis,

I have considered, albeit to a limited extent, the interrelationship between age and gender, and the ways in which these facets of identity influenced individual's thinking about their access to and enactment of senior leadership positions (see, for example, the narratives of Gay and Rachel). This study did not, for instance, include the career experiences and aspirations of BAME, lesbian or disabled women headteachers. By drawing on a limited range of identities, my study neglects some of the plurality, richness and divergences that may appear if my sample included a greater variety of demographic characteristics. Although some of these identity strands are under-represented in educational leadership (Showunmi, 2016), there needs to be further research taking an intersectional approach to the lives and experiences of potential and existing women leaders.

If I were to do this study again I would reconsider the sampling strategy I used, and its implications. As I pointed out in Chapter 3, snowball sampling has numerous limitations (see, for example, Browne, 2005; Cohen et al., 2011). The women I interviewed did not provide access to participants with a great variety of demographic characteristics. This was either because their social and professional networks did not include a great deal of heterogeneity, or that some groups of women special school headteachers did not wish to take part. Moreover, my identities (my whiteness for example) may have had an effect. On reflection, I am left wondering whether a sampling method where I actively sought variation between women special school headteachers may have resulted in richer, more nuanced data. If I were to take this approach, I would need to consider ways in which I may be able to analyse the cumulative effects of an individual's different identities in a way that does not detract from the complexity of each identity strand. This would certainly be a methodological challenge, but may be a way of uncovering further nuance and complexity in the stories of women special school headteachers.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued for IPA's inclusion in the range of methods currently used to research gender and educational leadership. In doing so, I have told a methodological story alongside one about the stories of special school headteachers past, present and future including the challenges

that the six headteachers had to navigate. I have emphasised the importance of individual voices, complexity and idiosyncrasy when considering potential aspirants' perceptions of special school headship and their occupational intentions. Yet, while telling this methodological story, I have been confronted by a juxtaposition between the idiosyncratic and the mainstream, the individual and the group, divergence and commonality.

IPA's analytic process forces the researcher to move from exploring the nuances of an individual narrative in an in-depth manner to creating a table of themes for an entire group. In writing up such a project, the researcher has to walk a tightrope between the nuances of an individual narrative and the broad patterns and commonalities that exist across participants' accounts (Smith et al., 2009, p. 107).

This is a balance that I have found difficult to strike. I chose to poetically represent each of my participants' narratives with the intention of doing justice to idiosyncrasy, yet I also outlined a typology of potential aspirants that actively groups participants together. I fear this creates a tension in my work, for example in the analysis of individual stories and grouped experiences. Reflecting on my thesis as a whole, I still feel that I have not been able to represent the women's narratives in a way that does not obscure elements of their stories. There was complexity and richness in individual narratives that I could not explore in the confines of this thesis, and I believe that the study is limited by its absence, themes such as professional jealousy which were complex for three of the participants. Likewise, there were commonalities that existed among the women that were not captured in the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged or the typology I produced. Since I had to be concise and produce a coherent account of my research, it was not possible to explore these additional divergences and commonalities. A smaller sample size may alleviate this tension to an extent. Indeed, if I were to design another IPA study in the future I would consider drawing on a smaller number of participants, conducting multiple interviews with the same participant and exploring each facet of their career story in more detail. This would further illuminate dissenting voices which may be at odds with those officially or more

commonly expressed. This may also help to avoid falling into the trap of oversimplifying the huge amount of complexity that emerged from individual participant's past, present and future narratives. Furthermore, a smaller sample size may allow for greater experimentation with IPA, and further consideration of how IPA may be useful to researchers studying special school educational leadership.

Reflecting on future research

This study has raised many issues that warrant further investigation and discussion. Firstly, given ongoing concerns regarding the desirability of the special school headteacher role and the recruitment of tomorrow's school leaders (Bush, 2015; The Future Leaders Trust, 2016), more research focusing on the motivations, views and aspirations of potential special school headteacher aspirants is urgently needed. This would help policy makers and researchers better understand what more can be done to encourage deputies to aspire towards and apply for vacant special school headship posts. In accordance with the idiographic principles of IPA, the study reported on in this thesis focused on a small homogeneous sample.

As stated in Chapter 3, this study was not designed to investigate the differences between men and women. It aimed to explore the diversity and commonality among a small group of individual women. It would, however, be interesting to compare the findings reported in this thesis to those of a future IPA study which focused on the career experiences past, present and future, motivations and aspirations of male deputies. Exploring both the divergence and convergence both within and between gender categories may be highly illuminating.

The sample drawn on in this study consisted entirely of white women and, as I have mentioned, this is a significant limitation of my work. There is a need for future research which explores the ways in which gender interacts with ethnicity, social class, disability and other identity strands to influence individuals access to senior leadership posts (Coleman, 2012; Showunmi, 2016). An intersection that may be a fruitful area for further research is that of

age. The experiences of the older and younger women in this study (Gay and Rachel) were particularly interesting. Both participants perceived their age and gender as being potential challenges to career advancement and satisfaction in the past and current educational climate. Edge et al. (2016) argue that there are many differences between senior leaders belonging to Generation X (those under 40 years of age) and the baby-boomers that preceded them. The authors maintain that the two generations perceive their careers and working lives in dissimilar ways (p. 2). A future study investigating older women teachers' and leaders' career histories, perceptions and aspirations may contribute to our understanding of generational difference in educational leadership, and point to ways in which the teaching profession can best recognise, and ultimately retain, experienced members of staff.

Likewise, further studies focusing on the careers, experiences and aspirations of young leaders (both Generation X and Generation Y/ millennials who were born between 1978 and 1990 (Edge et al., 2016, p. 5)) may be illuminating. An investigation into their attitudes towards career and headship may aid succession planning, and provide a useful addition to the gender and special educational leadership literature.

Finally, further work is needed to explore the relationship between reflexivity, the individual and career aspiration in the field of special education. By using Archer's model of reflexivity as a theoretical lens, researchers could further investigate and compare the lives, careers and aspirations of autonomous, meta-reflexive and communicative potential special school leadership aspirants. This could be used to inform the theory and practice of leadership preparation.

In summary, it has been suggested that there are three directions in which future research might usefully proceed:

1. Further research using mixed methods may be undertaken into the lived experiences and perceptions of women and men special school headteachers.

2. Researchers may fruitfully explore the ways in which gender, ethnicity, age and other identity strands interact to influence the career advancement of individual women, and the factors contributing to their constraint and enablement in the labour market.

3. Continued investigation into individual special school teachers' and leaders' reflexive 'internal conversations' and their influence on career aspirations may be illuminating.

Conclusion

As opposed to a homogeneous group, individual women special school headteachers perceive and experience their leadership stories in special education very differently. Their experiences of headship past, present and future are multifaceted and laced with idiosyncrasies. Individual women demonstrate different 'stances' towards the constraining and enabling influences they encounter on their career journeys, as well as those they anticipate encountering in the future.

The women who took part in this study described carefully negotiating and positioning themselves towards the constraints and affordances of their professional and personal lives in ways that could be characterised as autonomous, meta-reflexive or communicative (Archer, 2003, 2007, 2012). Headteacher views in my sample of special school headship are complex, multi-layered and often contradictory.

My interpretation of the IPA rich stories of female special school headteachers, has given me unique findings of the schools for pupils with severe learning disabilities (SLD) and physical disabilities (PMLD) as a sub-group, all identified constant change as a perceived area of challenge. If the stories of the female headteachers of the schools for pupils with moderate learning disabilities (MLD) as a sub-group are interpreted, the common issue with three of the headteachers identified as a perceived challenge and constraint is insufficient funding. However, four of the headteachers from this sub-group identified bureaucracy, relentless school improvement and the power of accountability as perceived issues of

challenge. Constant change was identified by three of this sub-group. Other perceived challenges showed one female headteacher of a special school for pupils with MLD added "*TLR (Teaching and Learning Responsibility posts) was a massive problem at middle leadership level*". A female headteacher of the special school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) added a "*lack of vision within the local authority for the future of the school*" and "*falling roll*" as other challenges.

All six female special school headteachers provided experiences of coping in challenging times.
"*maintaining motivation and enthusiasm is important to me*"
"*passionate belief that we can positively influence quality learning for young people into adulthood*"
"*our schools outreach service keeps going, providing inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools*"
"*good support from other colleagues, my business manager, governors and friends*"
"*regular exercise keeps me focused during challenging times*"
"*I think more support is needed for female heads, some sort of counselling service would be great*"
"*we need a range of coping strategies that are personal to our own identity and context of our individual school*"

The stories are very personal, but one major theme does emerge as a strategy used by the six female special school headteachers during challenging times, and that is the support provided by the leadership team and colleagues. Friends and family, health and well-being, and having a personal philosophy.

The female special school headteachers saw their leadership journeys developing in different ways. Four of the female headteachers identified outreach work and the National Professional Qualifications framework as opportunities for developing themselves. Partnership links with other organisations and school restructuring were identified by three of the female headteachers.

Looking at the schools for pupils with SLD/PMLD as a sub-group, two of these female headteachers identified school restructuring proposals as opportunities for developing their positions. The elements of these stories may be linked to the fact that their local authorities both have long-term plans to restructure and extend its special school provision for pupils with SLD/PMLD.

All six female headteachers of the schools for pupils with a learning disability identified partnership links with other schools. This was the only common opportunity identified within the female special headteacher stories. During the unstructured interviews with four of the special school headteachers, the most important theme expressed in different ways by different female headteachers from different authorities centered on a general dissatisfaction with the way the local authorities managed its special schools – this was the same for those special school headteachers in multi academy trust schools. For special school headteacher one, who is a very experienced headteacher of a special school for pupils aged five to sixteen with MLD, this is linked to the removal of funding for outreach work into mainstream schools and in "*defining the population of children we work with*".

For headteacher two, who is a very experienced headteacher of a special school for pupils age three to nineteen and who works nationally with the Department of Education (DfE), the concern is linked to a lack of strategy for its special schools within the local authority, she decided to develop a group of special schools into a Trust. For headteacher three, who is a very experienced special school headteacher for pupils aged five to sixteen with ASD, it is a fundamental difference in the vision for the future development of her school to that of the local authority. She also explained her difficult multi academy trust discussions. Finally, for headteacher four, who at the time of the research was a recently appointed special school headteacher for pupils aged five to sixteen with ASD, the main concern focused on a bulge in admissions and also the Ofsted framework, similar to the concerns of headteacher one. Significantly, special school headteacher one saw the local authorities lack of vision for its special schools as an opportunity.

As highlighted in the introduction of the thesis, special schools in England are going through a period of significant change. The nature of pupils' special educational needs is changing and becoming more severe and complex, with a significant increase in the number of pupils identified as having autistic spectrum disorders, challenging behaviour and mental disorders. These changes, together with the Governments drive towards a more inclusive society and a more inclusive education provision, are having a direct impact on the special schools themselves, which, as a consequence, are experiencing significant major change. Other significant changes in education have also taken place and some of these changes are linked to the nature of special school headship itself and to the organisational structures headteachers use to lead and manage their schools.

The main challenges for female special school headteachers in this study is the constant change linked to relentless school improvement, the Ofsted framework, together with funding concerns, bureaucracy and maintaining a balance between, work, childcare and private life. These challenges presumably, could apply to any headteacher but clearly the restructuring of special schools is a challenge that only headteachers of special schools could face. Opportunities, however, are there to enable female special school headteachers to see their leadership journey developing further. The opportunities are connected to partnership links with other schools and outreach, but other initiatives linked to SEND Sufficiency Government funding to support the expansion of specialist provision. Outreach support into mainstream schools is possibly one of the most important opportunities available to headteachers of special schools, and this is directly in line with the Government's policy on developing the role of special schools.

Although the research was only small, the broad findings relating to the identification of the challenges, the strategies being used to manage them, described by female special school headteachers in their stories, and opportunities being utilised by this small cohort of female special school headteachers are meaningful. Further research would be needed to explore these areas of provision, some of the implications for professional practice

identified in this thesis, however, could have value for special school and mainstream headteachers, and may be worth reflecting on.

The unique stories of special school headteachers demonstrate the stories developing in different ways. Each participant special school headteacher showed different start points. Structural accountability, and individual challenges have been identified in the womens' stories. No two stories are the same and each story gives the diverges and converges of their special school headship journey. Family responsibilities and childcare issues are a key feature for all of the women.

Themes emerged to illustrate how structural forces and human agency has shaped, defined and at times constrained the special school headteachers' journey towards headship. The stories reveal how each special school head has been shaped by both structural forces and their own agentic capacity to act and chose. The structural forces have played a big role in the participants' decision making, some of the decisions cited by individual participants have become enablers or constraints.

A question has emerged from my research;

> How do we change the structural forces around us to become more agentic and to encourage other aspiring special school leaders to use their agency to become special school headteachers leading transformational change, and school improvement for the future growth of special school education?

Finally, some of the women in this research have overcome significant barriers and live with the notion that everyday experience is a consciousness and have used their intentionality to become National Leaders of Education, championing SEND regionally and nationally. One participant Gay received an OBE for her services to education and encourages the ideas of transformational leadership to make a difference in special school education.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Literature review search strategy

Search Terms (these were searched for singularly, and grouped together with Boolean operators and, not or) e.g.	administration/ agency/ aspirants/ aspirations/ assistant principal/ barrier(s)/ career/ career advancement/ career aspirations/ career decision-making/ career experiences/ career histories/ career narratives/ career progression/ career stories/ career trajectories/ choice(s)/ constraint(s)/ depute(s)/ deputies/ deputy head/ deputy headteacher/ deputy principal/ educational administration/ educational leadership/ employment/ enable(rs)/ equality/ female/ feminine/ femininities/ feminism/ feminist/ gender/ gender equality/ gender inequality/ headship/ non-aspirant/ occupation/ preference(s)/Special/ SEND/special educational needs and disability/ principalship/ professional aspirations/ school leadership/ school management/ secondary school/ secondary school headteacher(s)/ secondary school principal(s)/ secondary school teacher/ sex/ teachers' lives/ teachers' work/ under-representation/principal/ woman/ women
Format	Books, monographs, journal articles, electronic articles, newspaper articles, conference papers, conference proceedings, theses, official, governmental and legal documentation.
Language	English

Appendix 2

School Work Force in England Special Schools/PRU/AP 2018

Decline in men in Headship From 45 years of age					
Increase in women over 49 years of age Headship					
Under-representaion of women age 35-39					

STATE FUNDED SPECIAL/PRU/AP

|	Heads	Deputy and assistant heads	Classroom teachers	Total	%
MEN					
Under 25	0	0	91	91	1
25 to 29	2	19	629	650	10
30 to 34	17	125	934	1,075	16
35 to 39	50	224	788	1,062	16
40 to 44	91	178	693	962	15
45 to 49	132	179	663	975	15
50 to 54	118	127	581	826	13
55 to 59	76	103	406	586	9
60 and over	46	27	227	300	5
All ages	533	981	5,013	6,527	100
WOMEN					
Under 25	0	1	503	504	3
25 to 29	1	48	2,203	2,251	13
30 to 34	19	213	2,356	2,588	15
35 to 39	62	422	2,024	2,508	15
40 to 44	132	387	1,798	2,317	13
45 to 49	181	399	1,857	2,437	14
50 to 54	221	399	1,689	2,309	13
55 to 59	183	231	1,105	1,519	9
60 and over	81	122	554	757	4
All ages	880	2,222	14,088	17,190	100
MEN AND WOMEN					
Under 25	0	1	594	595	3
25 to 29	3	66	2,833	2,902	12
30 to 34	36	338	3,290	3,664	15
35 to 39	112	646	2,812	3,570	15
40 to 44	224	564	2,491	3,279	14
45 to 49	314	578	2,521	3,413	14
50 to 54	338	526	2,270	3,134	13
55 to 59	259	334	1,511	2,105	9
60 and over	127	150	781	1,057	4
All ages	1,413	3,203	19,103	23,719	100

DfE, (2019)

The School Work force in England DfE, (2018) statistics for special schools show interesting results regarding the under-representation of women in leadership, the statistics have been obtained from the DfE (2018) results updated in October 2019.
There is an upward trend in women in the special school sector sustaining leadership positions at headship level from the 49 years and upward in the range of figures. There is a decline in men holding special school leadership positions from the age of 45 upwards.

The results are conflicting with the national picture of women's under-representation in leadership positions in schools in England. (See Literature Review p. 65), evidence explaining the importance of developing younger women in special schools from middle leadership upwards, using Hall's (1996) concepts of using cues from more experienced female special school headteacher role models.

Appendix 3:

Figure 7: *Theoretical framework*
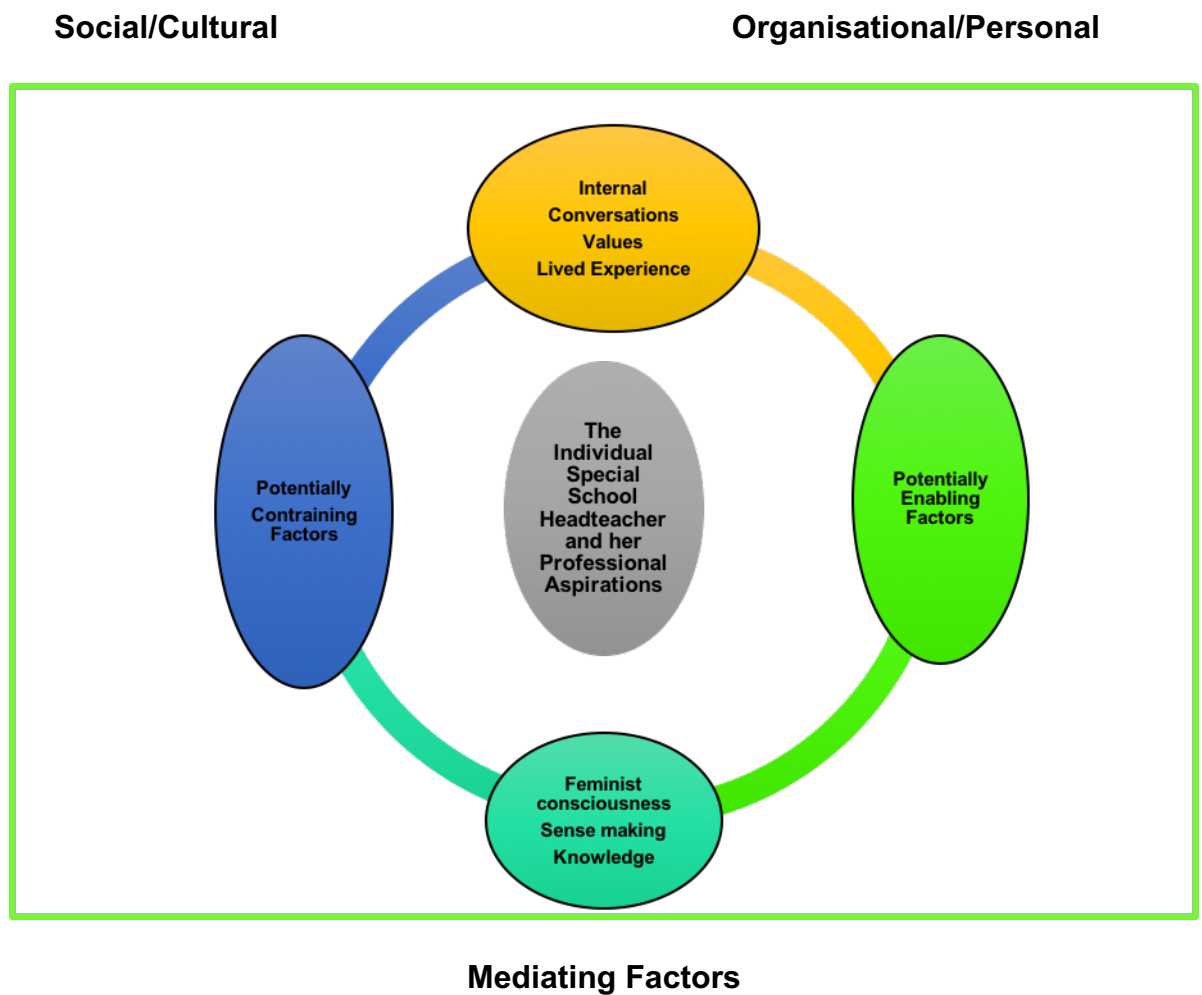
Appendix 4: A selection of IPA studies in education

Authors	Journal	Phenomenon	Sample Size	Data Collection
Waring, T., (2008)	Electronic Journal of Business	Issues and Challenges in the use of Template Analysis	10	Unstructured and semi-structured
Tan, S., (1993)	Academic Book	Analysis Student Teachers Reflective	32	Unstructured
Denovan, A. and Macaskill, A . (2013)	British Educational Research Journal	The experience of transition in first year undergraduates	10	Individual semi-structured interviews
Huws, J. and Jones, R. (2015)	Autism	Young People's perceptions of autism	9	Individual semi-structured interviews
Klockare, E., Gustafsson, H. and Nordin – Bates, S. (2011)	Research in Dance Education	How dance teachers use psychological skills in dance classes	6	Individual semi-structured interviews
Borisov, C. and Reid, G. (2010)	European Journal of Special Needs Education	The benefits of adolescents with an intellectual disability functioning as tutors	5	Field observations; Video recordings; Pictures from student cameras; Individual semi-structured interviews
Jeong, H., and Othman, J., (2016)	The Qualitative Report	Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis from a Realist Perspective	8	Unstructured
O'Connor, N., and Buckley, A., (2017)	E-book	Qualitative Research into Motivation A Novel Approach	31	Unstructured Interviews

Appendix 5: Ethics Approval

On Wed, 26 Sep 2018 at 11:34, <converis@shu.ac.uk> wrote:
Dear Amanda

Title of Ethics Review: Stories of Female Special School Headteachers and their Experience of Headship

Ethic Review ID: ER6378688

The University has reviewed your ethics application named above and can confirm that the project has been approved.

You are expected to deliver the project in accordance with the University's research ethics and integrity policies and procedures: https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice.

As the Principal Investigator you are responsible for monitoring the project on an ongoing basis and ensuring that the approve documentation is used. The project may be audited by the University during or after its lifetime.

The following advisory amendments were suggested, which you may wish to address:

This is a strong proposal for an interesting study. A few small points need to be addressed/clarified regarding ethics:
- review participant information sheet to clarify: whether participants will have an opportunity to remove parts from transcript following review (if they regret anything that have spoken about); acknowledge that it is possible that participants could be identified, depending on what they choose to share (and how you will limit possibility of this); clarify likely length and likely location of interviews (e.g. place to suit them?) so they know what they are committing to. Also - the introductory sections are quite academic- could they be redrafted with the participant audience in mind, to really focus on what the study will involve (e.g. a potential participant might not be familiar with narrative approaches or poetic analysis and so these need to be explained). The sheet also refers to a pilot study- should this be deleted?
- the document containing interview questions appears to be a list of research questions- please replace with a list of interview prompts
- please clarify- will the poetic analysis be shared with participants? If so, will their reactions to this be sought? And if so, how will you respond if they are unhappy/disagree with the analysis?

- the consent form is included- but a sentence needs adding to the online Converis form to clarify how this consent with be negotiated, e.g. discussed with participant, revisited post interview
- 72 hours is a very short window for participants' withdrawal post interview, and would be unlikely to give them time to review the transcript- I suggest re-thinking this, particularly if you plan to give them an opportunity to remove parts of the transcript (and if not, why not?)
Otherwise, very best of luck for what promises to be a really interesting study..

Should any changes to the delivery of the project be required, you are required to submit an amendment for review.

Wishing you success with your study.

Sheffield Hallam University Ethics Team

Appendix 6: Extract from pilot proposal - semi-structured interview sample

SECTION B

- **Describe the arrangements for selecting/sampling and briefing potential participants.** This should include copies of any advertisements for volunteers, letters to individuals/organisations inviting participation and participant information sheets. The sample sizes with power calculations if appropriate should be included.

> I have selected one Headteacher from a mainstream secondary school. The Headteacher has expressed an interest in distributed leadership during face to face discussion during a 'women in leadership' session. I explained to the women that I was developing a research pilot which would focus on leadership. I gave background information regarding my research project for the Doctorate in Education course. Women attending the women in leadership development session were highly motivated and showed enthusiasm for the leadership discussion.
>
> I left the women with my contact details and asked if anyone would be interested in being interviewed as part of a pilot study using semi-structured interview questions on the subject of school leadership. Five women emailed to express interest in being interviewed in their own educational settings. For the purpose of the pilot I will interview one Headteacher.

- **What is the potential for participants to benefit from participation in the research?**

> Using a semi-structured interview with open questions relating to how leadership is distributed in the participant school. I will be a natural observer that will give the participant the opportunity to explore their own leadership ideas and experiences. The participant will be able to reflect on their own leadership practices by participating in the pilot study.
>
> Questions regarding shared practice will support the evaluation of their current team working practices. Reflection and evaluation may support the outcomes of the school whole school development plan.

- **Describe any possible negative consequences of participation in the research along with the ways in which these consequences will be limited.**

> The semi-structured interview process may expose elements of undeveloped leadership practice, divisions in staff teams and different styles of leadership that hinder the development of shared practice.
>
> Open ended questions may lead to participants moving away from the subject matter and may limit the findings.

Appendix 7: Pilot project – reflective account

Reflecting on the pilot project

I chose to focus my pilot research on the lived experience and professional aspirations of a headteacher. Existing research in this area suggests that women teachers experience their careers differently to their male colleagues, Coleman, (2002). It also suggests that men are more likely to achieve headteacher status than women (DfE, 2015). My decision to focus on a female only sample is not unique in the field of gender and educational leadership, Smith, (2011). Listening to the leadership story of the pilot participant has enabled me as a researcher to "tap into experiences with a feminist consciousness" (Stanley & Wise 1993). In order to make contact with a woman Headteacher willing to be interviewed, I used my professional contacts via the school's network. I was at the time working as a Headteacher in a nearby school. I began by drafting semi-structured interview schedules and open ended questions.

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed which aimed to explore the headteacher's leadership story. The exact nature of the schedule was informed by existing literature on women and educational leadership, and discussions with my supervisor. While creating the schedule, I followed the guidelines outlined by Smith et al. (2009) on schedule development. These guidelines highlight the importance of open, expansive questions which "do not make too many assumptions about the participant's experiences or concerns, or lead them towards particular answers" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 60). The open-ended questions I included in my schedule focused on the past, the present and the future. They aimed to explore the participant's leadership journey to date, their present-day lives as headteacher as well as

their professional aspirations. The semi-structured interview schedule used in the pilot study was developed with the intention of encouraging the participant to explore their leadership journey and subjective experiences in detail.

The pilot interview confirmed expected timings and enabled me to gain confidence in questioning techniques. The pilot study raised my awareness of the need to avoid ones focus too early on and looking for 'themes', as this could limit my capacity to hear what the participant was actually telling me. I also wanted to avoid making assumptions or the being bias with my own knowledge and understanding of leadership as a female headteacher myself. I was conscious that I needed to resist the temptation to ask leading questions or listen selectively and risk losing my important subject data.

The pilot study also raised my awareness of important ethical considerations to which I needed to give some thought in using a story of a woman headteacher interview.

The pilot participant talked about their daunting and painful leadership experiences and rise to headship. The pain was evidently still raw. At the time to stop my iPhone recorder and to leave with no more than a thank you would have seemed inhuman and inappropriate, and of course I stayed and we talked after the interview. This did bring home to me that my role as a researcher was distinct from that of a counsellor, and to attempt to talk on the latter role would be inappropriate. It is important to be reflexive as a researcher by being consciously self-aware and thoughtfully attuned to one's own pre-understanding, actions and reactions while engaged in research (Berger, 2015; Finley, 2002). Reflexivity, then "involved turning your gaze to the self" (Shaw, 2010, p. 234). It enables the recognition that we, as researchers, are inevitably implicated at every stage of the research process. We are enmeshed in the world that we study and therefore it is necessary to reflect on the impact that we have both on our participants and the research project we conduct. I realised, though that I needed to prepare any future participants psychologically for life story interviews, by warning them of the possibility that narration could take them into uncomfortable or painful areas. I needed to do this in a way that would not frighten off future participants or create any sense that it is a requirement of the interview that they must talk

about personal or traumatic aspects of their journey into school leadership. I did carry out a debrief session with my participant to ensure that she was comfortable with her interview and the processes that I had used. I reiterated how the information would be used as part of the research process. I further ensured the participant that she would receive a copy of the transcript and could amend any part of the recorded interview. For future interviews I will give an indication or gentle warning, whilst emphasising to participants that they must feel free at any time to miss out questions that they do not want to answer, or to stop talking or change tack should they find themselves discussing areas they would rather not. In addition, participants should feel free to have the iPhone recorder turned off at any time during the interview. In my pilot research it was at this stage of the process that I was able to acknowledge my own perspective in relation to the evidence that I had collected from my participant. I did this by paying attention to my own social relation to that of my participant by writing notes on this aspect in the first stage of analysis. The aim of this stage according Mauthner and Doucet, (1998) is to "retain some grasp over the blurred boundary between their narratives and our interpretation of those narratives" (p.127).

The narrative interview has been described as "practical production, the meaning of which is accomplished at the intersection of the interaction of interviewer and respondent" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.44)

Therefore, a different interviewer on a different day will never be able to collect the "same" story from a participant. The challenge of narrative research is not to "control subjectivity, inconsistency, and emotionality" of stories but to capture these phenomena as data and interpret them appropriately. Gabriel (2000), offers some sound methodological advice: "It is the researcher's task not merely to celebrate the story or the narrative but to seek to use it as a vehicle for accessing deeper truths than the truths, half-truths and fictions of undigested personal experiences."

The process of "accessing deeper truths" (p.445) according to Gabriel is not straight forward, and narrative research should not be equated with privileging the judgement of the researcher over the participant. Therefore, the validity of the research process rests on evidence of the researcher's reflexive awareness.

Aristotle's (1996) definition of good literature is that it has a powerful emotional impact on the reader. The researcher therefore must acknowledge and engage with this emotional dimension turning sympathy, joy, revulsion, and mixed emotions into research data.

My research work cited from my pilot study is evidence of going beyond the limitations of narrative approach to analysis. Using the ideas of Gabriel (2000) and Aristotle (1996) I believe through poetic craft and practice we have new possibilities in the use of narrative poetry analysis to understand new leadership possibilities. Using elements of poetry in my data collection, analysis and write-up has the potential to make my thinking clearer, fresher and more accessible.

Piloting the analysis

The pilot data takes the form of a narrative story. I have considered the notion of meaning-making through the creation of and response to temporality using personal and social (interaction), past, present, future (continuity/temporality) and place (situation) and poetry using the tragic mode as an analytical device.

I have analysed my pilot data and temporality and poetry acts as a means of responding to ideas generated by the exploration, creating a deliberate space for meaning-making.

In the first part of the analysis I used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000), three-dimensional space narrative structure using temporality as the centre of the narrative analysis. The three-dimensional space narrative structure created meaning within the participant's interaction within the personal, social, past, present, future situation and place within their story. I found that I was able to analyse the story using temporality as the participant's actions are likely to happen in the future. This process has supported how I have re-storied the participants account to give more depth and meaning to the story by using poetic analysis.

I have used Gabriel's (2000) notions of the tragic mode and have focussed the data on the undeserved misfortunes in the tragic mode.

Tragic stories according to Gabriel (2000) are accompanied by "grief, pain, fear, anger and possibly, guilt and shame" (p.69). Tragic stories grow out of

human misfortunes and often deal with unintended consequences of human actions. Furthermore, tragic stories cast the protagonist as a victim. Gabriel (2000) explores misfortune and says "misfortune assumes the character of painful trauma shock or disillusionment" (p.69). Interestingly he states that tragic stories generate no "moral amnesty", even if victims bring about their own downfall through their own actions.

Instead as Aristotle (p.145) pointed out, "tragedy generates feelings of compassion and anxiety, or pity and fear". Gabriel steers the arguments demonstrating other predicaments that functioned as sources of tragic stories were forced redundancies, disciplinary incidents, strikes, industrial disputes and serious accidents. In all of these cases the plot can be summarised as a trauma to an individual or group. Gabriel (2000) is explicit when he says the point of most tragic stories is that the world in general and organisations in particular are "unjust and unkind" (p.70). Gabriel (2000) and Aristotle (1996) both agree that an individual's happiness or pride counts for not very much. Many organisations vision and values focus on happiness, health and well-being. Gabriel (2000) is saying the individual is a "pawn to be manipulated, controlled, and finally discarded as "dead wood" (p.70) when his or her usefulness is finished.

The key poetic trope of such tragic stories is the attribution of blame to a supernatural principle such as fate, or, more commonly a malevolent agent or scapegoat.

I identify my participant's narrative re-storied as an undeserved misfortune in the tragic mode.

To support my research findings, I referred to Frye's (1957) five distinct types of tragic mode, adopting as the key criterion initially proposed by Aristotle (1996 p.146), the focus being the importance of the victim in relation to the audience.

My pilot research participant is identified within Frye's (1957) low mimetic tragedy. A misfortune visited on a person like ourselves and attributed to a villain, a thoroughly heartless person who is denied any redeeming qualities. My participant's narrative analysis shows evidence of an undeserving victim in the tragic mode. A tragic story such as my participants, according to

Gabriel (2000) "draw agency" from the undeserving victim and place it squarely on the "villain or on a malign fate" (p.72).

Authors such as (Lasch 1984; Schwartz 1993) have argued that victimhood, rather than heroism, defines the dominant form of subjectivity. They argue that groups and individuals construct their identities on the injustices done to them.

My pilot data analysis re-storied into tragic mode demonstrates the participant constructing identity towards new leadership possibilities.

How narrative debates supports possible claims to knowledge

I have explored a variety of narrative debates attempting to make sense of the different frameworks and interpretations of narrative analysis. I have developed my own knowledge and understanding of narrative using different theorist's approaches such as Bruner (1990), Riessman (1991), Polkinghorne, (1995), Elliott, (2005),

Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Gabriel (2000-2004), Aristotle (1996) and Frye (1957).

I have focussed my narrative framework using the work of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space narrative structure, using temporality as the centre of the narrative analysis, with a deeper exploration and critique of Gabriel's (2000) work on modes of poetry for analysing narrative and my main focus being the tragic mode.

I have realised during my pilot research phase that the participant evidence from a narrative interview can demonstrate "living, telling, retelling and reliving mark the qualities of life" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.187). In terms of my participant's story and narrative inquiry the retelling has supported an understanding of meaning-making within narrative inquiry. The work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) has focused my work within the matters of temporality; the place and balance of theory, people, action, certainty, and context and the place of the researcher. I have learnt that, as a researcher to be able to think narratively is to continually explore these matters. I believe the purpose of retelling, is to offer possibilities for reliving, for new direction and new ways of doing things.

The work of Gabriel has inspired my thinking to use narrative poetry to explore imaginative possibilities for my main research and to continue to work at the boundaries outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to use new ways to analyse leadership stories and coming closer to understanding experience.

The importance of reflexivity and piloting a semi-structured interview for research

Researcher reflexivity is arguably "the defining feature of qualitative research" (Finlay, 2002a, p. 211). A reflexive attitude is one that is consciously self-aware and thoughtfully attuned to one's own pre-understandings, actions and reactions while engaged in research (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002b). Reflexivity, then, "involves turning your gaze to the self" (Shaw, 2010, p. 234). It enables the recognition that we, as researchers, are inevitably implicated at every stage of the research process. The pilot semi-structured interview has been an important part of the reflexive process. 'Too focused too early and looking for themes' was something I needed to avoid, I am glad I did some navel gazing in the early stages of my participant interview and analysis of the pilot data. I know that we are enmeshed in the world that we study and therefore it is necessary to reflect on the impact that we have both on our participants and the research projects we conduct. Shaw (2010) notes that Gadamer's notion of horizons and Heidegger's thoughts on our being-in-the-world provide "support for adopting a reflexive attitude in experiential qualitative research" (p. 235). It has been argued, however, that while reflexivity is important it should not be the sole purpose of a qualitative research endeavour (Shaw, 2010). As Pillow (2003) warns, too much self-reflection can descend into narcissism and hence detract from our participants and the ways in which they have made sense of their lived experiences (p. 176). With this warning in mind, I have chosen to explore two of the issues that I encountered during my pilot research which required a great deal of reflexivity. It is to an exploration of my positionality as a researcher and the task of representing my participants' leadership narrative that this chapter now turns.

The pilot has given me scope to critically analyse key approaches to data analysis by exploring, comparing and building on temporal and poetic narrative analysis.

I have used Bruner's ideas (1996, 1990) to explain the process of narrative construction and the metaphor in which identity can be understood as a "landscape of mind" Bruner (1986, p.26). Bruner identifies the landscape of action and a landscape of identity. The two are related in a dynamic and interdependent relation, and together they make up what Bruner (1996) calls the individual landscape of the mind. Bruner's concepts have shaped the narrative analysis used in my participant's story and re-storying and therefore making sense of experiences, actions and events. Conclusion about identity takes the form of stories in which an individual creates meaning about who the leader (my participant) thinks he/she is.

I have understood the continuous process of narrative inquiry and further understand the account of the multiple levels which are temporally continuous and socially interactive. I have found the central task of narrative analysis to be evident when it is understood that people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others. To support these notions, I have used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space narrative structure as my main approach to narrative analysis in the pilot and I have built a deeper meaning by re-storing my participant story using the poetic frameworks of Gabriel (2004) and Frye (1957). Therefore, I have been able to establish that interaction involves both the personal and social aspects of experience. I have used this approach to analyse my participant's story for the personal experiences and the interactions with other people. I have been cautious during this process and understand that life and narrative go together and therefore the same data can be used to tell a deception as easily as the truth. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) highlight the dangers of the "Hollywood plot" (p. 11) demonstrating a plot where everything works well in the end. This type of approach loses authenticity and respect for the research.

Temporality has been central when analysing the participants story. I was able to consider the past and present actions of the participant and the

actions that are likely to occur in the future. Specific locations were evident in the participant's landscape that begin to give meaning to the narrative, such as the participants physical location and how the activities affected the participant's experiences. The process of analysis has shaped how I have re-storied the account within the framework by exploring deeper using Gabriel's (2000) modes of poetry for analysing narrative, my participant's analysis shows evidence of an undeserving victim in the tragic mode and interestingly (Lasch 184; Schwartz 1993) have argued that victimhood, rather than heroism, defines the dominant form of subjectivity. They argue, that groups and individuals construct their identities on the injustices done to them. I have experimented further with the poetic licence idea as it is based on a range of poetic interventions and is justified by giving a voice to experience. Gabriel's (2004) ideas have provided a focus on the protagonist in the tragic and the poetic tropes, within the poetic tropes my participant experienced blame, deviousness and mean behaviour as a motive created by the villain. The victim, my participant depicted themselves in their story to be noble, decent and worthy. A deeper emphasis has been gained from Frye's (1957) model demonstrating five distinctive types of tragic mode. Using Frye's ideas, I have identified new elements in the re-storying and have identified the participant's experiences in the low mimetic tragedy demonstrating a misfortune visited on a person like ourselves and attributed to a villain, a thoroughly heartless person who is denied any redeeming qualities.

My pilot data analysis re-storied into the tragic mode demonstrates the participant constructing new leadership possibilities. One possible claim is the participant learns about their own leadership style and leadership traits to develop or avoid.

The pilot research findings show possible claims to knowledge and can be used to explore leadership stories further for the main study.

The exploration of leadership stories for the main study may lead to co-constructed interaction. Creativity can bring new issues to light, Craft (2012). Exploring a co-construction of feelings, emotions, experiences ideas or thoughts could be unique if expressed and articulated in an inventive and poetic way, obtained at a conscious or unconscious level. The pilot study has given insights into the challenges of using my chosen frameworks for

analysis, those of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), three-dimensional space, using temporality as the centre of the narrative analysis and Gabriel's (2000) notions of the tragic mode that focused on the undeserved misfortunes in the tragic mode. The limitations within the frameworks drawn from the pilot interview have led me as researcher to investigate a different research design. Using Interpretive Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996), I will use this research method to investigate the ways in which the participants for the main study perceive, understand and make sense of the special school headteacher role enabling my research to focus on the particularity of individual's lived experiences and how this has influenced their aspirations towards headship. Unstructured exploratory questions will be used within the research design.

Sheffield Hallam University

Appendix 8: Unstructured interview question

A central research question for the main study:

What do the stories tell us of female special school headteachers' experience of headship past, present and future?

- *Can you describe your special school leadership journey so far?*

  Prompts
- *Have you encountered any barriers along the way?*
- *Has anything stopped you applying for a promotion in school leadership?*
- *Has there been any motivating factors in your leadership journey?*
- *Have you had access to training and development throughout your leadership progression?*

The interview will be audio recorded lasting for approximately one hour.
The interview will be transcribed onto a hard and electronic copy.

The transcript will be given to you to check for accuracy within 3 days of the interview taking place.

Sheffield Hallam University

Appendix: 9

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS
School Leadership Research

Project title: Stories of Female Special School Headteachers and their Experience of Headship

You are being invited to participate in the above main research study. Please take time to read this information sheet carefully to enable you understand the pilot study and what the study is about. Please ask for clarification if necessary and take the time to decide whether you are willing to be involved.

Background to the research study

The research study will focus on the special school headship stories past, present and future of six headteachers. The qualitative methods I will use will take the form of six unstructured interviews centred within my first research question. (Why do participants decide to take positions of leadership?). The unstructured interviews will be recorded and transferred onto typed transcripts for analysis.

I have chosen unstructured interviews with open questions to enable the interviewee less restriction within their answer to the set questions: Situated within a constructivist paradigm, and taking a narrative approach, this research study will explore the life stories of female special school headteachers, building an understanding of their leadership journeys in order to act as an inspiration to others.

The stories of women leaders will be heard through conducting unstructured interviews with female special school headteachers. The stories will be analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996).

It is hoped that this approach will develop new knowledge on the life stories of female headteachers in special schools and go some way towards exploring, developing and trialing an alternative approach to analysis.

What is the purpose of the pilot study?
A reflective view of the pilot project will be added to the study

The research study will seek to develop an understanding of:

1) Why do the participants decide to take their journey towards headship?

2) Are there any challenges that women must navigate in their leadership journey?

3) How do women special school headteachers see their story developing?

by focusing on the leadership of six headteachers.

In the main research study you will be asked to answer the above questions that relates to how special school leadership has been experienced. It is how you interpret the questions and the keywords that you use that is being researched for the main research study. The methodology will be refined based on research findings.

Do I have to participate?

Your participation is voluntary and a participant can withdraw from the research study at any time without giving a reason. If you decide to participate you will be given this information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. If you choose not to participate or later, decide to withdraw, you can do so without prejudice. Your decision whether to participate or not will not be recorded in any way that any way that may affect your relationship with myself or the university. The data collected, will be analysed after your research input. You have the right to withdraw your data one week after your interview and when you have seen and agreed your interview transcript, if you decide you no longer wish to be involved.

What will happen if I agree to take part in the research study?

If you agree to participate, I will contact you to agree a suitable time and location for meeting. At the meeting, you will be given instructions regarding the interview that will take place. The interview will be unstructured and you will be audio-recorded throughout the task. The audio recordings will be transcribed and you will be offered an opportunity to view a summary of the interview. You may also have a copy of the transcript that has been produced and a copy of the research study that will show where the research interviews have formed part of the research project.
At the conclusion part of the research you will be invited to participate in a debrief session.

The debrief will include clarity of the unstructured interview and how useful you found the interview when exploring your story of special school leadership. In addition, were the methods for collecting your interview data useful in terms of audio recording and transferring onto a transcript. Would you have preferred any other methods. The debrief will invite you to give your thoughts regarding the use of methods for your interview.

Are there any risks involved in participation?

There is no risk involved in your participation with the research study. All research procedures will be kept confidential. The data will be stored and secured on an encrypted data drive that the university provided. This is a

secure data drive. You will be given a number that links you to the research, there will be no identifying features on the material and it will be carried out in confidence. Your voice recording will be transcribed, so that there is no identification with it. Once the transcript has been made the audio recording will be destroyed immediately. On completion of the Doctorate, the transcript data will be destroyed in accordance with the university guidelines. The transcript will be referred to in the main thesis when analysing the stories of special school headteachers. The data may also be used for other research purposes that may link to the main thesis.

The research study complies with the Freedom of Information Act 1998.

Contact details

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Tel: 0114 2393545
Email: acostello@bentsgreen.sheffield.sch.uk

Study Supervisor:
Email: J.wainwright@shu.ac.uk

Duration: The interview will last for 1 hour

Sheffield Hallam University

Appendix: 10

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Main research study: Stories of Female Special School Headteachers and their Experience of Headship

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Amanda Costello of Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) Doctoral research supervised by SHU. I understand that the main research study is designed to gather information for academic work. I will be one of six participants for this main research study.

Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies

	YES	NO
1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.	☐	☐
2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.	☐	☐
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher.	☐	☐
4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet.	☐	☐
5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.	☐	☐
6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes.	☐	☐

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Contact details:

_____

_____
_____

Researcher's Name (Printed): _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Researcher's contact details:
Amanda Costello
Tel: 0114 2393545
Email: acostello@bentsgreen.sheffield.sch.uk
Please keep your copy of the consent form and the information sheet together.

Appendix 11: Initial exploratory coding

These questions have been adapted for a series of exploratory coding questions supplied by Dr Kate Hefferon and Dr Elena Gil-Rodigguez London IPA Training 2015

Stage	Questions asked of the data
Descriptive	1. What special school headship experiences are being claimed by the participant? 2. What personal experiences are being claimed by the participant? 3. What appear to be the most important characteristics of the participant's experience
Linguistic	1. Has the participant used any phrases or words that stand out? 2. Are specific phrases, words or sentences repeated? Why do you think this is? 3. Has the participant used any similes, metaphors or analogies? What do they appear to mean? 4. Has the participant used any terminology, phrases or jargon specific to teaching or education more generally? If so, what do these appear to mean to the participant? 5. Is there anything noteworthy about the pronouns, expressions and tenses that the participant is using? What do these appear to mean?
Conceptual	1. What events or experiences are especially salient for this participant? Why do you think this is? 2. How has the participant made sense of this particular experience? What does this mean to them? 3. How has the participant made sense of this particular personal experience? What does this mean to them? 4. What is the significance of this? 5. Is anything missing?

[Handwritten note across top: "Carmel's role and identity. Seems close to Sense of Self"]

Emergent Themes	Transcript (Carmel)	Exploratory Coding
Sense of Satisfaction	66. the big motivator is the sense of satisfaction that you get from	*Identified downside to promotion. Additional work pressure. Place to be.*
	67. and the downside is there is a lot of pressure of work.	*Own sense of where to be.*
	68. Ofsted scrutiny and huge levels of accountability it sometimes	*Pressure, stress and fear of mistakes*
High levels of accountability	69. feels like a (lonely) place to be and that you know that the book	*driven away by Motivation*
	70. stops with you and that you have the (pressure) of making the	*honestly place, this could imply pressure and loneliness not recognised by others*
	71. (right decision) and feel that you are not allowed to make any	*or support in place for completion.*
	72. (mistakes.)	*Role completion*
Motivating factors	73. one of the (motivating) elements of special headship is on the	*Standing in front of staff. Motivating others - vision and values*
	74. first day of term when you stand up in front of the (staff) and	*Activities Meaningful. Clearly values (career and disability)*
Having Sense of Direction	75. present the schools (vision) and (values) from the whole school	*knows what this means. What she cares about herself.*
	76. development plan.	
	77. Giving a sense of direction in support of the teaching and (values traits)	*Constructing own identity via the*
Upholding the rights of young People with SEN?	78. learning for students with special needs, you feel that you are	*Inclusion agenda and disability rights for young people with SEN*
	79. actually making a difference towards inclusion.	
	80. (Inclusion) I my thing and giving students with (SEN) the best (heronage)	*Caring and Nurturing approach to work. Female role model*
	81. opportunities is important to me and my moral compass	
Teaching/leading as Caring	82. before I became a headteacher I carried out the Inclusion	*Ownership of own professionalism and ability*
	83. Manager role this was my absolute passion that (informs) my	*Aspiration achieved. Sense of completion*
	84. (Practice)	

[Handwritten note below: "4" with bracket — "Long term ambition, values, Moral imperative."]

Appendix 13: Superordinate and subordinate themes for one participant (Carmel)

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Illustrative Quotes
The intuitive and psychological repercussions of change	Turning points and pain	• Started teaching in special education 30 years ago (p. 1, line 5) • I have worked across the different phases from foundation stage to Post 16, I have a good overview of education, more than most. (p. 1 line 8-9) I have worked in middle management as Head of Inclusion • One pivotal moment led me to apply for SLT positions. (p. 2 line 22-23). • It was like an evolution and I became Assistant Head then Deputy Head one year later, a real turning point in my career in special education. • Five years later, I was ready for a new challenge's, (p. 3 line 46-47). The changing landscape in education brought about new system leadership and change. My school organisation changed and I became Head of School with an Executive Head now in place. (p.4 line 49) • My own personal challenge started at this point (p. 5 line 50)
	Identity crossroads	• Head of school is a difficult position and a steep learning curve for me, many frustrations have arisen, (p. 5 line 66) • The big motivator is the sense of satisfaction that you gain from the position, the downside is the pressure of work (p. 5 line 67). I need the autonomy of being a substantive headteacher. (p. 5 line 70)

	Feeling rejected and undervalued	• I applied for headship in a special school in a different authority. I was feeling undervalued in my current school. (p. 4 line 54) • I was successful in gaining an interview but pulled out due to work pressure…I was my own worst enemy and barrier to my progression. (p. 4 line 59) • I had also lost much confidence in my role as Head of School, I felt over-shadowed, (p. 4 line 60).

Others and occupation as central to identity and well-being	Teaching as identity	• I have a wealth of experience and really enjoyed being in the classroom (p. 2 line 20) • Working three days in the classroom and developing Inclusion across the Primary schools was great, I am a people person and like to make a difference (p. 2 line 22)
	Positive relationships and influences	• I strived to build positive relationships with others, using my own initiative and having an inclusion project to share with others was positive and helped me to grow my confidence, (p. 2 line 18-20)
	Care and consideration	• I always supported others in school and have time for all colleagues • I do feel isolated sometimes because of the role that I am in and feel the pressure from all sides, at time I don't always feel supported (p. 6 line 97 -98)

The experience of being left behind	Rapid and imposed changes	• My leadership journey has become harder (p. 7 line 105) • Recently I went for a headship and didn't get the job, it was hard getting back up after that, so much has changed in

		• education it's difficult to keep up (p. 7 line 108) • It knocks your confidence and you start to question yourself (p. 7 line 109) • So that part of my leadership journey has been unhappy getting back on your feet and finding a sense of direction is again is quite difficult (p. 7 line 110)
	Past experience of interviews and professional jealousy There is no place for me the homogeneity of leadership	• I try not to be bitter I have experienced professional jealousy and know it can be a problem (p. 8 line114-115) • I applied for the Deputy Head position at my current school, the other candidate didn't get the position, he was upset and refused to speak to me until he left the school. I was made to feel uncomfortable for several months, I would not behave like this myself and I am an authentic leader who embraced a shared value.

Appendix 14: Superordinate and subordinate themes for all participants

Participant Name	Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Rachel	Meaningful components of identity	• Actively managing self in the workplace • Gendered expectations of work and home • Internally motivated to learn and succeed • Values as a guide and key part of identity
	The desire for more	• The constraints, pressures and isolation of headship • The opportunities of headship • The possession of correct leadership, attributes and experiences
	Making sense of having both children and leadership aspirations	• Young deputy for 10 years • Leadership lonely place • Professional sacrifices made • Didn't want to be a headteacher • Juggling children difficult • Encountered professional jealousy
Amy	Perceptions and expectations of women leaders	• Gendered expectations at work and home • Consciously aware of being a woman in teaching • The importance of women in leadership

	Feeling threatened	- Tension between self and culture - Change and the future as causing doubt and insecurity - Feeling constrained and limited - The difficulty of being a deputy and headteacher in the same school	
	Catalysts and driving forces	- Values as guiding and inspiring - The desire for more	
Jo	Meaningful components of identity	- Values as a guide and key part of identity - Internally motivated to learn and succeed - The value of timing, planning and experience	
	Feelings of frustrations and anxiety The management and pressures of work	- The power of Ofsted to judge and learning to lead - The experience of constraint - Anxiety and tension regarding the future - Work perceived as pressured and intense - Transition from deputy to headteacher difficult	
Gay	Internal drivers and motivations	- Values and desire to make a difference - Career as central to identity - Confidence and competence	

	Sources of conflict and tension	• The conflict between career and having children and a 7 year career break • Conformity and resistance • Conflict between self and educational culture
	Balancing constraints	• Pressure of job role CEO • Pressure of time – works nationally • Looking forward
Carmel	The psychological repercussions of change	• Alienation and pain • Identity crossroads • Feeling rejected and undervalued
	Others and occupation as central to identity and well-being	• Teaching as identity • Positive relationships and influences • Care and consideration
	The experience of being left behind	• Rapid and imposed • There is no place for me: the homogeneity of leadership
Sally	Relationships as enabling	• Relationship with headteacher at the time • The value of support and encouragement from others • The importance of relationships and networks
	Constraints and limitations	• Anxiety around the time, timing and politics of unions • Confidence in difficult leadership situation in new school • Guilt and sacrificing work for children

	Aspiring and looking forwards	- A desire to position oneself in new headship - The constraints of a flawed headship - A desire to make a difference

Appendix 15: Superordinate and subordinate themes across cases

| **Superordinate Theme 1:** Managing constraint	
Subordinate Themes	Illustrative Quotes
Negotiating professional and caring responsibilities	• "Women must navigate many challenges in their leadership positions, you have to try twice as hard when you have children of your own." (Rachel, p.3, lines 75-76). • "I never wanted to be a head, I was happy working in a special school part-time and looking after my children. Then….My career path just seem to change and opportunities started to arise." (Sally, p.1, lines 9-10). • "I was a classroom teacher for a long-time whilst my children were growing up, I didn't have any aspirations. I moved into leadership later because it felt right for me. I started to construct a new leadership journey" (Carmel, p.7, lines 37-39). • "I created a better life for my children moving into leadership" (Gay, p.5, line 105).
Meeting the challenges of special school headship	• "New school as headteacher was challenging, staff culture was difficult" (Sally, p.5, line 76). • "High levels of accountability has led to loneliness" (Carmel, p.6, line 72). • "Conflict between self as leader and educational culture" (Gay, p.3, line 74). • "Did not always have self-belief in own abilities to lead and take a school from RI to good" (Jo, p.6, line 72). • "Difficult conversations were common place" (Amy, p.6, line 112). • "Encountered professional jealousy" (Rachel, p1, line 19).
Balancing work and well-being	• "7 year career break has been central to my identity and getting my priorities right" (Gay, p.2, line 45). • "I draw strength from other leaders by sharing successes and insecurities. I realised there was no system for supporting headteachers" (Amy, p.3, line 59).

	• "The realisation that a difficult staff culture can destroy your aspirations as a leader" (Sally, p.10, line 205). • "Children and headship has been difficult" (Rachel, p.2, line 55). • "Good coaching and mentoring has given me more balance for my health and well-being" (Jo, p.11, line 183). • "The downside to promotion is the additional work pressure, sometimes a lonely place to be" (Carmel, p.5, line 68).
Superordinate Theme 2: Motivating forces	
Influential others and worthwhile learning opportunities	• "Enjoyed my NPQH training, I would like to do a Master's in Education" (Rachel, p.3, line 69). • "Governors were keen to work with me and wanted me to become a substantive headteacher" (Jo, p.5, line 61). • "I perceive promotion as a reward for experience and dedication to her role" (Carmel, p.1, line 10). • "An opportunity for promotion led me to complete my Master's Degree in Education" (Gay, p.3, line 52). • "An effective Business Manager made all the difference" (Jo, p.5, line 56). • "Exposes the importance of peer to peer support for special leaders" (Amy, p.4, line 64). • "Opportunities gave confidence to take on leadership roles as roles began to arise" (Sally, p.1, line 10).
Values and desire for social justice	• "Being consistent becomes authentic with values based leadership, Staff wanted good authentic leadership" (Amy, p.11, line 192). • "I wanted to create and embrace change to improve education for pupils with special educational needs" (Jo, p.1, line 10). • "I have had a career defined by leading the way in SEND. I stuck to values in SEND … only female headteacher determined to make the changes" (Gay, p.3, line 70).

	• "Value career with a humanistic approach, meaningful events and developing links to find new opportunities for young people" (Carmel, p.2, line 23). • "Grasped learning opportunities to give pedagogical growth and inclusivity" (Sally, p.2, line 21). • "I learnt to be a good and outstanding teacher, I enjoyed my leadership journey" (Rachel, p.2, line 13).
Superordinate Theme 3: Perceptions of special school headship and the future	
An opportunity for influence	• "Awareness that all leaders in a special school environment need good and active staff teams to implement school improvement" (Sally, p.3, line 129). • "The changing school landscape in education led to rapid change and increased motivation. A desire to construct new meaning for self and others" (p.3, line 64). • The experience of weak leadership led to my increase in determination, values, conformity and motivation to influence change over time" (Gay, p.3, lines 55-56). • "Ownership of change management using creativity and confidence in own abilities to make a difference and influence others" (Jo, p.2, lines 12-13). • "Difficult culture, but I stayed to grow my ambition for the future of the school" (Amy, p.3, line 48).
Leadership encounters and burdens	• "staff reorganisation led to redundancies, leading was stressful and difficult. I was petrified of bad feeling and anarchy from the staff" (Amy, p.4, lines 132-149). • "Autocratic leadership in special led to a non-existent leadership team. Leadership became broken……relationships were frayed" (Jo, p.4, lines 50-55). • "Difficult leadership around me led me to construct own SEND identity, I developed new opportunities. This action started to diminish my self-doubt" (Gay, p.4, lines 109-118). • "Second headship in special, difficult experience of hostility and challenge. Professional jealousy evident. Undermining

	staff team that put up barriers" (Sally, p.4, lines 124-137).
	• "My leadership journey started positively and it has become much harder over time. Finding a new direction has become difficult. (p.3, line 112).
	• "Did not want headship – Deputy for ten years. Special headship too accountable and hard work. I was too young for level of responsibility" (Rachel, p.2, line 27).
Making a decision	• "Remained motivated in seeing children learn" (Rachel, p.2, line 59).
	• "I made the decision to rise above professional jealousy to hold the belief that I deserve to be treat with professional regard" (Carmel, p.3, line 119).
	• "Making the decision to become a regional and national pupil premium strategic lead. Making a difference to pupil learning and inclusivity" (Gay, p.3, line 122).
	• "Making the decision to tackle poor practice, have difficult conversations and become a strong authentic leader. (Amy, p.6, 328).
	• "When times are tough, being self-reflective, using collaborative approaches, work with the challenge and staying professional to make the difference. (Sally, p.5, lines 179-211).
	• Employing an effective Business manager made the difference to change management. Together we were able to lead the school in the right direction" (Jo, p.3, line 56).
	• I am a genuine person in a difficult leadership position. I want to move the school from RI to good" (Amy p.5, Line 4)

Appendix 16: Superordinate and subordinate themes across cases sample of creative analysis
Superordinate themes – Yellow post-its placed to the left side, middle and right side of analysis
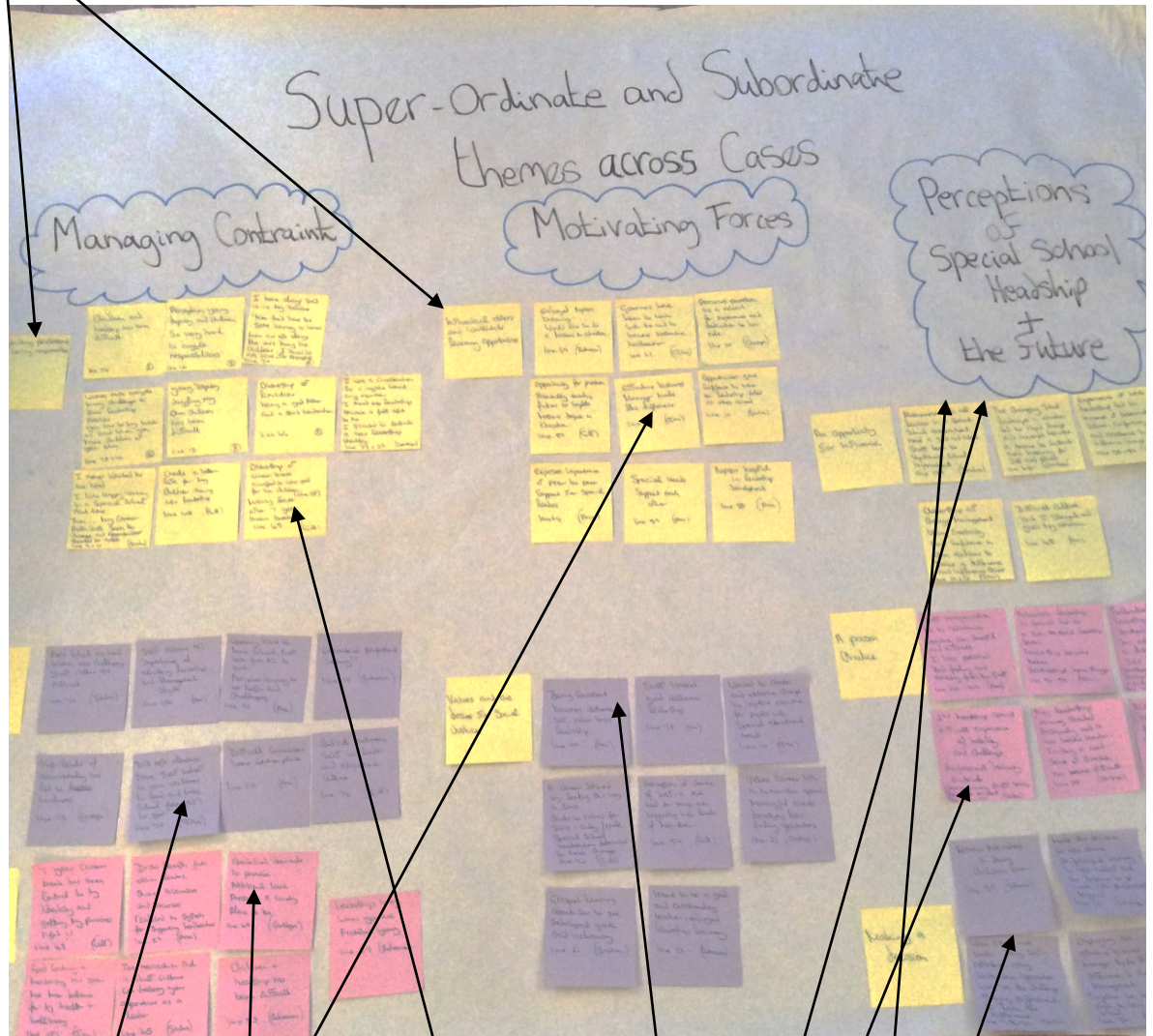
Post-its Subordinate Themes   **Values and desires for social justice**

Yellow, purple, pink

Negotiating professional & caring responsibilities

Constraints & limitations   *Making sense of having children*

Sources of conflict &

Tension   *Leadership encounters & burdens*

Meeting the challenges of special school headship

Opportunity for influence

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