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E822 EMA Dissertation (Option SSI)

An investigation into women's perceptions of leadership and the factors that influence aspiration and progression into secondary school senior leadership.

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Abstract

This narrative case study seeks to understand the heterogeneous way in which female leaders experience leadership and how experiences foster or inhibit aspiration and successful career progression. Six women from senior and middle leadership roles were interviewed. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed that enduring relationships with role models, secondment, and flexible working opportunities promoted self-efficacy and aspiration required to seek promotion. Despite believing that leadership is based on individual skills, the women experience leadership as gendered and have faced gender-based discrimination. Differentiated development programmes that acknowledge gender are recommended along with talent spotting and advocacy for aspirant female leaders.

Word count 100

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The value of school leadership in influencing teaching and learning and school improvement effects is well documented (Bush, 2009; Hallinger and Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2020). Therefore, building leadership capacity in schools is of significant importance. However, increasing focus on performativity has led to a growing reluctance for teachers wishing for progression to senior leadership roles and thus presents a major challenge for the sector (Ball, 2003; NAHT, 2021).

The Department for Education Census 2010-2020 (DfE, 2020) identifies that women are underrepresented by a significant margin at all levels of senior leadership and that the picture has changed very little over this time period. At the current rate of change women will not be proportionally represented at senior leadership level for approximately two decades (Fuller, 2017). By contrast to this, women are equitably represented at middle leadership level within secondary schools, so it would appear that there is a wealth of leadership talent that could provide the senior leadership capacity needed in schools.

Against this backdrop it would seem wise to try and understand the factors that enable the development of aspiration and success in attaining senior leadership roles for women. Professional development experiences that address gender inequalities have been found to significantly reduce gender bias in attitudes and behaviour (Wong, McKey and Baxter, 2018). The knowledge gained from this study has the potential to identify possible gender bias and inform leadership development programmes for aspirant female senior leaders. This would provide an alternative for the predominant generic training opportunities that do not consider context or address issues such as gender (Cliffe, Fuller and Moorosi, 2018).

To seek this personalised understanding of experiences that inspire individuals to aspire to progress to senior leadership in secondary schools, three research questions were developed:

RQ 1 'What are individual women's perspectives of gender in secondary school senior leadership, drawing on their experiences?'

RQ 2 'What experiences enable and constrain women's ability to secure positions as secondary school senior leaders?'

RQ 3 'What internal and external factors foster or inhibit aspiration to become a secondary school senior leader?'

A review of available literature on the topic and an explanation of the development of the research questions is provided in chapter 2.

Large scale quantitative studies are not able to capture the complex realities of women's experiences that create aspiration, identity, and self-efficacy (Martínez, Molina-López and de Cabo, 2021). Therefore, to explore the lived experiences that inform women's career decisions, this study employs a narrative case study approach. An interpretivist paradigmatic stance is adopted to seek an understanding of how the women in this study interpret their lived experiences that construct their reality. The lack of generalisability provided by this interpretivist standpoint is acknowledged. An explanation of the development of the research paradigm is further explained in chapter 3.

Throughout my 27-year career in teaching I have worked with very few female senior leaders. Unusually, in my current context women are comparably represented on the senior leadership team. This provides a rare opportunity to gain access of the perspectives of three female senior leaders about their individual perceptions of the factors that have enabled and constrained their career progression. To gain an understanding of the perceptions of aspirant female senior leaders, three middle leaders were also included in the study. The aim of this small-scale study is to identify how the experiences of three female senior and three female middle leaders have informed their career choices and aspiration. All participants are leaders in a local education authority (LEA) comprehensive in England.

Qualitative data was acquired through a single audio recorded semi-structured interview individually with each participant. Interviews were transcribed in full and analysed using an inductive approach of constant comparison to elicit themes from the data. Full details of the process of analysis are found in chapter 3.

Findings indicate that there are common factors that both facilitate and prohibit women's ability to progress into senior leadership. Significant themes identified were found relating to mentorship, work-life balance and shadowing which interrelate with identity and self-efficacy. Full details of the analysis and discussion of themes are found in chapter 4 and 5 respectively. Strategies to improve aspiration and self-efficacy of the women in this context and potentially enable them to gain senior

leadership posts have been suggested. As Smith (2011) summarises, there is a need for educational organisations to adopt a proactive approach towards developing new leaders and nurturing aspiration for leadership.

Word count 741

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Data from the DfE 'School leadership in England 2010 to 2020: characteristics and trends' shows that, although women make up 66.2% of classroom teachers, they account for only 53.3% of senior leaders and 40.1% Headteachers (DfE, 2022). This ratio has changed very little in the 10-year period reported.

This chapter aims to identify research that has been carried out during this time period to try to understand and address the pervasive under representation of women in senior leadership positions in English secondary schools. By reviewing the available literature, I seek to provide a summary of the current thinking and theories relating to this study. I start with the approach used to search for relevant literature, then a synthesis and critique of relevant literature and the subsequent development of research questions.

Google Scholar and the Open University Library were used to search for articles from the last 10 years that contained the keywords, 'women, aspiration, senior leadership, secondary school, England'. This search returned very few articles although some interesting earlier articles were selected for review. The search terms were widened to include further articles on women in leadership roles. Articles selected were limited to those which were peer reviewed and published in academic journals, narrowed down by publication date and context. An editorial article also helped identify relevant recent research that was then selected for review (Bush, 2021). Upon reading the abstracts of the articles, six were shortlisted. These were then read in depth and where articles cited appeared pertinent, also reviewed.

It is evident that there has been a decline in the number of published articles on this topic in the last ten years, with the focus being on Headship exclusively. For this reason, the search was widened to include research carried out outside the UK and in other sectors such as healthcare, where it was identified that the research could be applied to other contexts and was of significance to the research (Coleman, 2020; Wong, McKey and Baxter; 2018). Similarly, articles that were from beyond this timescale were also reviewed, if it felt that they were particularly informative and relevant to this study.

2.2 The issue

The DfE census 2010-2020 (DfE, 2022) reported that in 2019/2021 female teachers and part-time teachers were significantly less likely to be promoted to senior leadership and headship. Female teachers were 14% less likely to be promoted to senior leadership and 20% less likely to be promoted to headship. During the same time period part-time teachers were 45% less likely to be promoted to headteacher and 43% less likely to be promoted to senior leader. The DfE document suggests that this may be due to barriers to promotion but also presents that it could be a result of self-selection in terms of a work-life balance or that these women are less interested in pursuing promotion. I find the suggestion that these part-time and typically female leaders (only 3% male leaders are part-time) are simply less interested in pursuing senior leadership roles problematic. I believe the career decisions made by women to be more nuanced and complex than this suggests and influenced by gendered socialisation (Hoff and Mitchell, 2008). Guihen (2019) also suggests that a 'one size fits all' approach towards encouraging more women to progress to senior leadership is insufficient due to the heterogenous way women experience leadership and the career paths that they choose. In her report of a life history study on the career decisions made by 40 female secondary school teachers, Smith (2011) identified three spheres of influence: societal, institutional, and personal factors and that each of these is linked with self-perceptions about personal agency and response to the internal and external barriers that women may face. I intend to use these factors as a lens through which to investigate the statistics reported within my context.

2.3 Societal aspect

Challenging student behaviour is a norm in state secondary schools with effective school leadership required to manage this behaviour. In my current context a new Deputy Head was appointed with responsibility for 'behaviour and attitudes'. It was widely discussed amongst staff that a physically large, male appointment would be best suited for this role despite an internal female candidate applying for the position. I seek to understand how female leaders navigate the duality of female leadership and therefore my first research question is, 'What are individual women's perspectives of gender in secondary school senior leadership, drawing on their experiences?'

Wong, McKey, and Baxter (2018) conducted small scale qualitative research exploring the perceptions of academic leaders in the faculty of health sciences and identified that both men and women had similar perceptions of effective leadership such as vision, risk-taking, teamwork, integrity, and self-belief. They also identified similar 'joys and challenges' in leadership including building relationships, navigating bureaucracy, managing conflict and decision-making. Gendered themes identified included a difference in confidence with women less likely to take risks and narratives that focussed on societal and structural barriers that made it difficult for even well-qualified women to attain leadership. Both male and female participants recognised that gender inequalities were partially due to societal expectations favouring men (Wong, McKey and Baxter, 2018). Although not conducted in secondary schools, I believe this research to be of value in informing my study due to the similarities in context. The paper is based on narrative research conducted within a predominately female and academic workforce where women are under-represented in senior leadership. Martinez, Lopez and Mateos de Cabo (2021) using World Management Survey (WMS) data from six Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries identified that female headteachers were associated with higher quality management scores (QMS); a finding that contradicts Eagley (2003) who found that there was no difference in leadership effectiveness. Despite this Eagley (2003) and Heilman and Okimoto (2007) found that, where performance levels were ambiguous, women were perceived as less competent and rated lower by their male subordinates. Clearly women are effective in terms of leadership ability yet not perceived as such.

The Wong, McKey, and Baxter study notes that transformational leadership is still the industry norm and I believe this to also be the case in secondary school leadership. Despite the trend for distributed and collaborative leadership (Lumby, 2016) the performative nature of schools has seen an increase in managerialism (Ball, 2003). Distributed, delegated and collaborative forms of leadership are risky when so much is at stake; Headteachers could lose their jobs if an unfavourable inspection is reported (MacBeath, 2008; Hatcher 2005). Coleman (2020) found that gender stereotypes were still widespread throughout senior leadership roles in private and public sectors. The research found that, where women utilised a transformational leadership approach, they were seen as leading in a 'masculine' way and perceived as aggressive. Those that led in a 'feminine' way were considered weak and ineffective, a finding that supports the work of Heilman and Okimoto (2007). However, in contrast to this Sealy and Singh (2010) suggest that it is possible for successful

women to be seen as both agentic and communal and therefore feminine. Despite the societal barriers that women experienced and the slow progression of female leaders, many of the women interviewed recommended a feminine style of leadership focussed on developing a culture of support and integrity for all leaders (Coleman, 2020). Both Coleman (2020) and Wong, McKey, and Baxter (2018) identify that individual agency has the ability to overcome obstacles and achieve success but that, despite an improving picture, there is the need to gain a greater understanding of the gendered way in which leadership operates.

2.4 Institutional aspect

In my previous school, no part-time teacher was permitted to hold a leadership position at senior or middle leadership level. This limited the number of women in leadership positions in that context and may be a significant barrier for women's progression into senior leadership. I seek to understand other potential barriers and facilitating experiences that affect female leaders career paths and therefore, my second research question is, 'What experiences enable and constrain women's ability to secure positions as secondary school senior leaders?'

The large-scale quantitative study carried out by Martinez, Lopez and Mateos de Cabo (2021) focussed on the gender gap in headship or 'principalship'. Whilst the statistics are slightly better for women moving into senior leadership there is still clear evidence of a gender gap in senior positions and the scale of the study makes for a compelling argument that could be applied to a wider context than Headship alone (Martinez et al., 2019). The authors proposed a dual argument to explain why, although women exhibit higher QMS scores, there are fewer female Headteachers than male, and propose that studies that ignore the skills gap fail to appreciate the whole picture. Men are considered for Headship if they achieve a minimum standard that is lower than that for women. Therefore, fewer women are able to achieve the minimum standard and those that qualify have significantly higher skills attainment. This is referred to as the 'demand' side where women are compared to other women who are higher skilled, therefore making it harder to achieve the standard. The data used in this study is secondary and limited by the design of the original questionnaire. However, these findings are supported by Coleman's qualitative study where women reported in interview that they felt they had to work harder and in order to succeed they had to be

more able than their male colleagues. 50% perceived discrimination in relation to appointments (Coleman, 2020).

A commonly reported structural barrier was that of male dominated 'old boys' networks where women were not allowed membership. Informal networking on the 'golf course' or in the 'locker room' affords opportunities for sponsorship and mentoring that women were not able to access. Involvement in mixed and all women networks was seen as vital in progressing the career of women, yet networks set up exclusively for women are derided and stereotyped as extremist by men. In some instances, it was felt that the all-female networks were no longer necessary as all issues for women had been dealt with or that they were trivialised as nothing more than 'knitting circles' (Wong, McKey, and Baxter, 2018; Coleman, 2020). Guihen (2019) found that female leaders identified that working with a supportive role-model or mentor was critical for their development. In addition, the vast majority of female leaders felt that they learnt most from female role models and that they benefitted from networking with them (Coleman, 2020). The lack of female role models at senior level is a significant barrier to these opportunities and highlights the limited access of women to the top levels of that organisation (Smith, 2011; Kalitzi, 2017; Bruce-Golding, 2019, Coleman, 2020). Sealy and Singh (2010) note that individual successful women may be rejected as role models if they are seen to have sacrificed too much or exhibit behaviours to achieve or maintain their position, which are not in line with aspiring female leaders' identities. Therefore, the importance of role models is not simply symbolic. Having access to appropriate female role models is needed for identity construction. Access or lack of access to mentors and networks can facilitate or constrain women's ability to progress into senior leadership roles (Sealy and Singh, 2010; Kalaitzi et al., 2017; Coleman, 2020).

Kalaitzi et al. (2017) found six prevailing barriers to women's career progression including a work-life balance and lack of flexible working environment. Coleman (2007) identified that difficulties in combining a career and family had remained the same since 1996 with female Headteachers more likely to remain single or childless than their male counterparts. Around 2% of male Headteachers at this time took more responsibility for childcare by comparison with 40% of female Headteachers. A decade later and female senior leaders still had the majority of personal caring responsibilities within a cultural expectation that the mothers rather than parents have the majority of family responsibility (Woodhouse 2016; Bruce-Golding, 2019; Coleman, 2020). Coleman (2020) found that more women are choosing not to have children or to have their children at a different stage in their

career as a way of controlling interruption to their career path. However, the interrupted career pattern is still perceived as deficient by comparison with the more typical 'masculine' linear career pathway (Martinez, Lopez and Mateos de Cabo, 2021). Although this research is focussed on Headteachers it is supported by the Deputy Headteacher research reported by Bruce-Golding (2019). Given the paucity of literature in this area, I believe that the research papers are useful to inform my inquiry.

2.5 Personal aspect

A female headteacher in a previous organisation, told me that she wanted to appoint female leaders but that women simply did not apply for senior leadership roles. Jokes are often made about men applying for roles when they meet few of the person specification but that women won't apply if they don't meet every criterion. I seek to understand if there is any truth in these casual observations and therefore my third research question is, 'What internal and external factors foster or inhibit aspiration to become a secondary school senior leader?'

Clearly the three research questions are interrelated with teachers' experiences affecting their personal agency, identity, and aspiration (Bruce-Golding, 2019). I am interpreting the term 'personal' in this instance as the internal factors that affect decision making. Wong, McKey, and Baxter (2018) identified that women lacked confidence to apply for leadership positions and that they were far less likely to engage in any risk-taking than their male counterparts. This is mirrored by the findings of Hoff and Mitchell (2008) who found that 61% of women waited until they had met all the criteria for their first leadership position in contrast to only 5% of men. Not only do women have disrupted career paths but they are also less likely to move into leadership roles from the very start of their careers. Martinez (2021) identified that women had lower self-efficacy scores despite having higher QMS score. The double standard or prior experiences of much lower levels of success at attaining leadership roles may lead to development of lower self-efficacy and confidence (DfE, 2020).

Guihen's qualitative study identified that female deputy head teachers' aspiration for Headship were influenced by people in different positions in the organisation in different ways. From one perspective they found colleagues expressing a belief that they would be a good Headteacher and

suggesting that they apply for positions was motivational. Alternatively, observing people in higher leadership positions performing badly was a source of motivation to do the role better (Guihen, 2019). This would appear to closely align with the findings of Martinez, Lopez and Mateos de Cabo (2021) where they found that male Headteachers had lower QMS ratings than their female counterparts, so women in lower level of leadership might be able to observe this and feel that they would be able to carry out the role more effectively.

Smith (2011) and Bruce-Golding (2019) both identify that the women in their studies perceive their agency to determine their career paths differently. All women in the studies had experienced a range of experiences that had the potential to limit their career progression such as socialisation, discrimination, and gendered expectations of role. Yet despite this, some women still had the ability to make their own choices for their career within the constraints placed upon them. Likewise, Guihen (2019) found that narrative career stories of deputy headteacher revealed that the participants perceived the role in vastly differing ways which influenced the extent which they perceived themselves as potential headteachers. Smith (2011) identified two main career narratives, one where women position themselves as having the agency to make decisions and determine their own career path. The others describe their career experiences as a result of external factors. What is not clear from this study is what the external factors for the two identified groups are. The effect of these factors on personal agency is therefore not explored. The decisions made by women throughout their career are dependent on their experiences, characteristics, confidence and personal and professional motivating factors and each experience leadership in an individual way (Guilhern, 2019; Bruce-Golding, 2019).

2.6 Conclusion

The under-representation of women in senior leadership positions in secondary schools has improved over the last 10 years but only very slowly; at the current rate a representative proportion of female Headteachers will not be achieved until 2040 (Fuller, 2017). It seems research in this area has fallen out of favour and there are relatively few articles from the last decade, with the majority of research in secondary schools focussed on Headteachers or preparation for this role. Research on women in senior leadership more broadly is sparse, for this reason the most relevant sources used

in this literature review came from broader organisational contexts outside education (Coleman, 2020; Wong, McKey, and Baxter, 2018; Guihen, 2017; Guihen, 2019).

The lack of qualitative research focussed on women in senior leadership within secondary schools leads me to believe that this small-scale enquiry could add, albeit in a small way, a contextualised and nuanced understanding of women leaders' experiences and aspirations.

Word count 2848

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the lack of research focused on women in senior leadership in education. An absence of contextualised qualitative studies that could support wider scale studies was observed. Bruce-Golding (2019) suggests that the alarming rate that teachers are leaving the profession within the first five years of their career could lead to long-term deficits in recruiting future leaders. The aims of this inquiry are to seek an understanding of the factors that influence women's aspiration and success in achieving senior leadership positions, with a view to informing future leadership development within this context.

This chapter considers my paradigmatic stance adopted in response to the research questions and my interpretation of the Case study approach selected for this small-scale inquiry (SSI). My positionality as a researcher is explained along with the influence this has on the research methods employed, ethical impacts of being an insider researcher, and the interpretation of data collected in this way.

3.2 Philosophical framework

This study explores the experiences that have shaped female middle leaders and senior leaders' perspectives on leadership, and the internal and external factors that have affected their aspiration and success in gaining senior leadership roles.

RQ 1 'What are individual women's perspectives of gender in secondary school senior leadership, drawing on their experiences?'

RQ 2 'What experiences enable and constrain women's ability to secure positions as secondary school senior leaders?'

RQ 3 'What internal and external factors foster or inhibit aspiration to become a secondary school senior leader?'

The questions seek to understand the individuals' perceived opportunities and barriers to career progression, their personal stories to explain aspiration to become a senior leader, and how they individually experience leadership as a woman. The research is grounded in a small number of individuals' experiences and the construction of their reality, which clearly places it as an interpretivist study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Cresswell, 2012; Corbett, 2003). Although I seek to understand the meaning of events from the participants' perspectives, I acknowledge that I am part of the research and as such will influence and be influenced by the participants during the process. There is no absolute truth or direct knowledge to be collected. My role as researcher to make sense of these interpretations whilst acknowledging that this is mediated by my own frame of reference (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Scott, 2017).

I am an insider researcher, female and working in a middle leadership position. My career history and experiences may influence the data that participants wish to share and my interpretation of that data. As an insider researcher, I have a knowledge of the context and an understanding of the participants that facilitates the interpretation of words and gestures in what Geertz (1975) calls 'thick description'. My position allows me to work 'with' participants and my experience allows me to empathise and attend to subtle nuances of terminology, gesture or tone that could be missed by an external researcher. This SSI is not characterised as an ethnographic study, despite my position as an 'insider'. I have not lived the participants' histories; I am interpreting their version of their lived experiences (Given, 2008). The data provided is within the control of the participants, although there is an element of observation in studying participants body language and facial expressions during the interviews.

3.3 Methodology

The approach chosen for this SSI is a case study that utilises a narrative biographical approach. The term 'case study' has numerous and contested definitions that include a nebulous range of interrelating research methodologies. Tight (2017) suggests that 'almost anything can serve as a case' and therefore the term is not meaningful. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) in contradiction to this suggest that although it is not necessary to determine a single fixed definition for a case study, researchers should make it clear what the unit of analysis is and what constitutes

the 'case'. Where most researchers do agree is that a case study is carried out within a localised boundary of space and time (Bassey, 2012). Given that the context plays such a significant role in this research, I share the view proposed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017), and define the case as the career perspectives of six female leaders within a LEA secondary school in England.

Schools are complex and dynamic organisations, the holistic approach afforded by case study methodology allows the investigation and reporting of the interaction of human relationships and events. Case study methodology permits the study of real people in real situations and seeks to understand individuals' perceptions of events (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) identify that the contextual nature of case studies allows situated, nuanced and rich data to be gathered that might be missed in larger scale quantitative studies. They warn that to do justice to the case an in-depth understanding of the context is required. My role as an insider researcher and a female leader, allow me to have an empathetic understanding of the experiences and interpretation of the subtleties of participant responses (Denscombe, 2021).

A narrative life-history case study approach has been adopted for this SSI as it facilitates the understanding and interpretation of the experiences of the female leaders in my context as suggested by Yin (2009) and Merrim (1998) cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Mooney and Duffey, 2014). I agree with Goodson and Sikes (2001) who suggest that the professional and personal identities of individuals are not separate entities and that there is a relationship between individuals' historical experiences, social contexts, and perceptions. I am seeking to understand how the participants have internalised experiences and how this has informed their decision making, which is facilitated by utilising a life-history narrative approach (Floyd, 2012).

Broad criticisms of case study approach are that the findings are context specific and therefore not generalisable, subjective, and difficult to validate (Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2009; Bryman, 2016). The intention of this inquiry is to gain a deep understanding of this case, not to understand others or to generalise to a wider population (Thomas, 2017). Burton and Bartlett (2005) suggest that the strength of case study research is the in-depth analysis and 'relatability' that another researcher can build on. The success of a case study should be considered as the contribution it makes to the researcher and the readers' understanding. The scientific notion of generalisability is more suited to positivist studies (Ruddin, 2006; Simons, 2015; Thomas, 2017). The understanding gained from this study is intended for use in my context where it has the potential to inform

leadership development for women. I do not suggest that the findings would be widely generalisable.

The research described in this chapter has led me to select a narrative case study design as an appropriate methodology. It provides appropriate evidence to answer research questions which seek to understand individuals' perspectives of leadership, and aspiration for career progression. The chosen approach facilitates the in-depth, situated, nuanced understanding of participants' perceived experiences beyond the national statistics. The suggested scale and scope of this research are an appropriate choice given that I am a single researcher working within a limited time scale (Nisbett and Watt (1984) cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Tight, 2017).

3.4 Participants and Access

Researching the influences on women in senior leadership has interested me for some time. In my previous organisation this research would have been politically unwelcome and, in reality, impossible due to the lack of women in senior leadership positions (DfES, 2020). For this study the participants were purposively selected. They are not a representative sample of the school teaching body or leadership as a whole; they are solely representative of female leaders. The deputy and assistant headteachers, they are the only participants who are senior leaders and the main focus of this study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Thomas, 2017). Given that I seek to understand the perceptions of female leaders they are the only participants that can give that insight into their experiences and perspectives; they are the experts on themselves (Ball, 1990 cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017).

Clark (2011) identifies the 'gatekeeper' as the individual that supports the research process and provides access between the researcher and participants; in my context this is the Headteacher. Although not acting as an intermediary, it was important to gain and maintain access via the Headteacher as gatekeeper throughout the research process. Potentially, access to fieldwork could be denied at any point should the gatekeeper determine that it was in the best interests of themselves or the school to do so. Research into factors that affect women's opportunity to move into senior leadership may raise political issues or identify areas for development which may be unpopular. This alone, however, is not reason to avoid researching a topic that could potentially

have a wider positive impact (MacFarlane, 2010). The risk assessment is subjective and the fact that the Headteacher is new in post and any findings would not reflect on the school under their leadership, may have influenced their perception of the risk as being low (Clark, 2011).

3.5 Ethics

Although there are guidelines to support the work of a researcher that are particularly useful for a novice researcher, being a 'virtuous researcher' is about a way of being, rather than a set of rules to follow. MacFarlane (2010) summarises ethical research by stating that, 'A respect for persons should be the cornerstone of any piece of research involving human participants.' To do this I need to continually put myself in the shoes of the participant and reflect on ethical considerations throughout the process. The 'ethical researcher' online badged course highlighted the need for consideration of ethics at all stages of the research, starting with determining if research is even worth doing in the first instance and up to the dissemination of findings (Open University, 2023). However, as Macfarlane (2010) suggests, the research process is not always predictable and therefore personal integrity is required to ensure the well-being of participants.

Prior to any application for approval, I completed the ethical assessment form (Appendix 3.1) to ensure that I had considered all anticipated aspects of the research. Written consent via the ethical agreement form (Appendix 3.2) was gained after meeting with the Headteacher as gatekeeper. Research demands time of participants and researcher, which I consider is justifiable for this SSI as it has the potential to add to the body of research in this field and conceivably impact the leadership development opportunities within my context. Research should be carried out within an ethic of respect for the individuals; the reporting of the research should be done in a manner that is in their best interests and accurately represents their standpoints (BERA, 2018; Bassey, 2012). In reporting the research to the Headteacher and Governors, only information in the best interests of the participants would be shared, unless there was a safeguarding concern. This was not anticipated in this type of research.

Prior to commencement of the research, each potential participant was contacted in person to explain the aims of the research and to invite them to participate. It was emphasised that there was no compulsion to take part should they not wish to. Anderson and Herr (2009) warn that

participants may feel obliged to take part due to established relationships between researcher and participant and that power relationships may exacerbate this. In this instance participants are in an equivalent or higher leadership position, however, not all power is attributed through the hierarchical role within the school, and this therefore still needs to be considered (Costley, Elliot and Gibbs, 2010). After the initial contact a follow up email was sent explaining the aims of the research and the ethical arrangements such as data protection and anonymity. Participants were provided with the information letter (Appendix 3.3) and consent form (Appendix 3.4) and selected a convenient time and location for their interview.

At the start of the interview the purpose of the research, the method data collection and storage, and the right to withdraw consent at any stage were reiterated and verbal consent gained prior to recording. It may still be possible for participants to identify each other despite the anonymisation of data due to the small sample. This was also explained to participants (Bassey, 2012; BERA, 2018). Given the positional power of the participants, their expertise in conducting interviews and their ability to understand the implications of the research, all were able to give informed consent and understood their authority to withdraw this consent at any stage in the research. I hadn't anticipated that the experience would reveal trauma but appreciated that the experience of being a participant in this type of research was novel. In hindsight, this was naïve as the research is an in-depth and personal study, as Floyd (2012) suggests may lead to revelations that are surprising to myself or the participant. Floyd (2012) advises that in engaging in life history events participants may find themselves reliving distressing events. This was the case with one participant who chose to reveal a traumatic event but did so because she felt it was an important part of her narrative. This highlights the need to ensure that participants have their voices heard as they wish to and the need to ensure information collected is effectively anonymised (BPS, 2021). My position as an insider researcher may impact the information that participants feel they are able to share with me as I will continue to work with colleagues after the research process is finished. Furthermore, personal relationships may be established through the sharing of potentially sensitive information (Floyd, 2012). A further challenge is the tendency for participants to give opinions or answers that are socially desirable or paint themselves in a positive light (Macfarlane, Zhang, and Pun, 2014)

3.6 Data gathering

In order to ensure that the interview questions revealed data that was appropriate to answer the research questions, a trial interview was carried out producing data sufficient to reveal some initial themes. To create an environment where participants felt comfortable to share their stories, the interviews were semi-structured with a considered sequence of questions starting with 'settling questions' (Appendix 3.5) to put participants at ease, as suggested by Burton and Bartlett (2005). However, as the interviews progressed it became clear that few open-ended questions were required. Participants were encouraged to elaborate or clarify their answers through follow-up questions as needed. Mooney and O'Connor Duffy (2014) and Burton and Bartlett (2005) suggest that the informal interviews are an effective way to gain an insight into individuals' perspectives and have the appearance of a 'normal' conversation. Location, body language and conduct were considered throughout the interview process to reduce experimenter effects such as the Hawthorn effect and expectancy effect. Every effort was made not to lead the participants through any verbal or non-verbal cues (Thomas, 2017; Marvasti and Freie, 2017). Burton and Bartlett (2005) propose that at the end of an interview the interviewee should feel that they have had their say and feel that they have been heard. Participants reflected that they had enjoyed the process and some that they found it therapeutic.

During the trial interview, taking field notes was found to be a distraction which interrupted the flow. For subsequent interviews the tones and silences in the participant's voice on recordings were used to annotate transcripts (Burton and Bartlett, 2005).

Central to the purpose of this research is the accurate representation of participants' voices achieved via in-depth qualitative interviews and inductive analysis of data (Roulston, 2010). Burton and Bartlett (2005) suggest that the prejudices of the interviewer should be guarded against as much as possible and an effective strategy is to record interviews for accurate transcription. The interviews ranged in length and over 43000 words were transcribed. Although dictation software was used, each transcript needed to be fully edited due to inaccuracies caused by the use of the software. To ensure participants have control over their narrative, they were invited to receive the anonymised transcript and redact or clarify information they wished (Floyd, 2012).

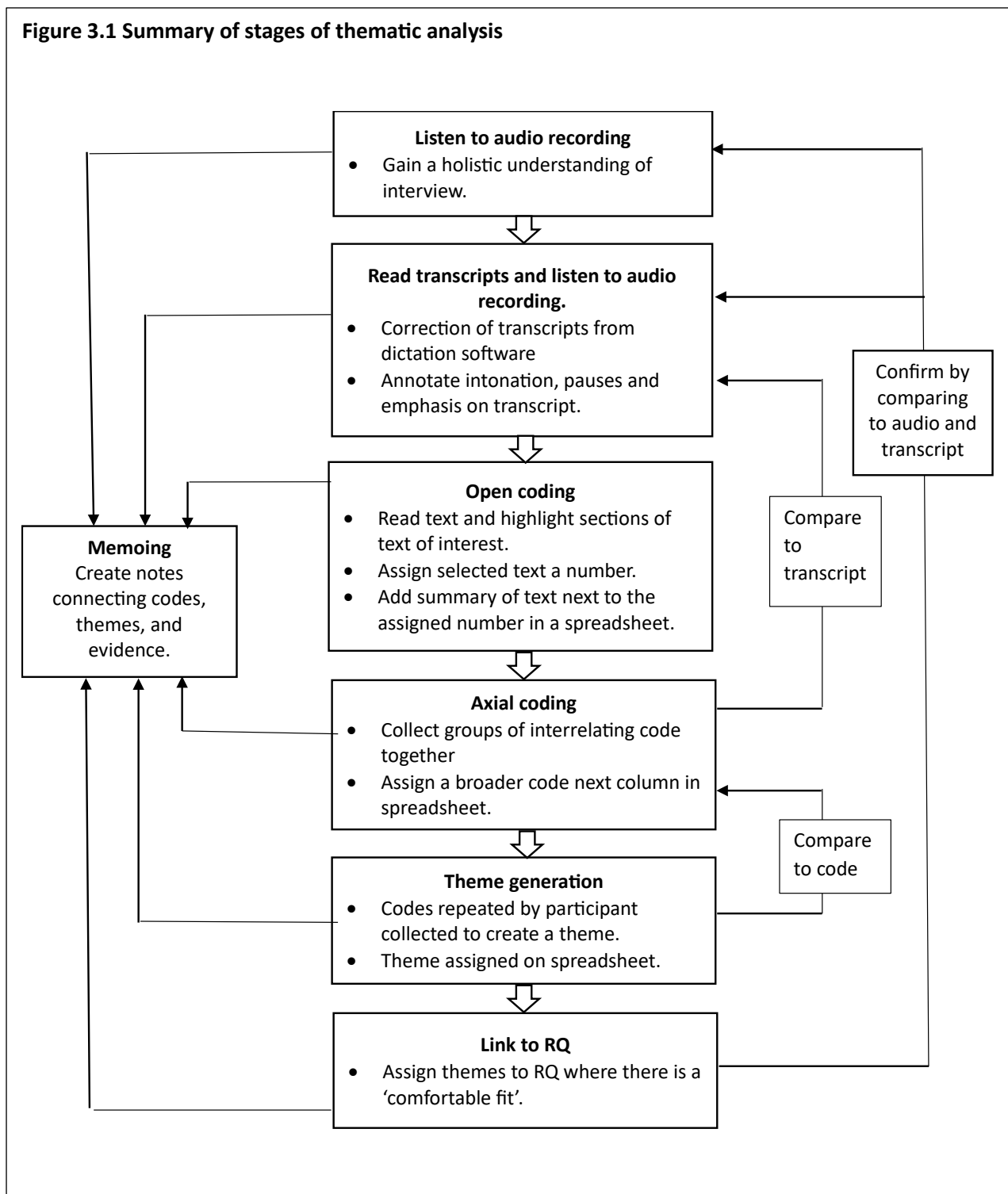
3.7 Thematic analysis

Data was collected and stored following a considered data protection plan (Appendix 3.6). Participant codes were used to avoid any bias created by using pseudonyms and to allow differentiation between the scripts from middle leaders and senior leaders, who provide two distinct data sets.

The intention of the analysis is to establish emergent themes from the data, however, the literature review and determination of three research questions will have an influence on the identification of themes. Furthermore, given my positionality, it would seem impossible to not have some preconceived conceptualization about the research; it is my own observations of leadership that have instigated this study. My position as an insider researcher facilitates an understanding of the context that ensures data is a 'comfortable fit' with identified themes rather than being forced to fit categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Birks and Mills, 2015).

A method of constant comparison rather than a linear process was utilised in the analysis as suggested by Thomas (2017). This process attempts to ensure that interpretation accurately represents the narratives of the participants and to seek original findings rather than simply to support the findings of prior studies. Corbin and Strauss (2008) likewise suggest this makes it more likely for discovery of variation and enables the linking and rationalising of themes. Stages of analysis, summarised in figure 3.1, were guided by Thomas (2017). Examples of stages of coding are provided (Appendix 3.7 and 3.8).

A criticism of this approach is that it is subjective, and themes are not verified. Working with another researcher, independently identifying themes for comparison would be an effective way to review and confirm analysis; this was not possible in this SSI. However, the position as an insider researcher allows a contextualised understanding of the participants, enabling a faithful representation of their perspectives (Thomas, 2017, Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Birks and Mills, 2015).



Word count: 2993

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Following coding and thematic analysis of interview transcripts, several key common themes were identified. The findings provide some situated evidence that help identify the factors that enable and constrain women's aspiration and success in attaining senior leadership positions in secondary schools. The intention of this analysis is to find themes that could be used to inform leadership development within this context.

In the literature review chapter of this dissertation, Smith (2011) identified three spheres of influence that affected the career decisions of female secondary school teachers. These spheres of influence are described as the societal aspect, the institutional aspect, and the personal aspect. Women experience and respond to each of these influences (which are interrelated) in highly individual ways and all are linked to individual identity and agency. The findings are reported in this chapter according to the aspect that they most closely aligned with and supported by literature identified in chapter 2.

A summary of participants roles, times in post, working pattern and childcare responsibilities are included for contextualisation of responses (Appendix 4.1).

4.2 Societal aspect

RQ 1 - 'What are individual women's perspectives of gender in secondary school senior leadership, drawing on their experiences?'

4.2.1 Perceptions of leadership

All participants gave examples of what they identified as models of good leadership exhibited by both men and women, indicating a belief that quality of leadership was not gender dependant. Three participants stated a belief that leadership quality is influenced by an individual's skill in understanding other people.

SLT1 'I think it is about human being, isn't it? It's about people, it's about individuals.'

ML1 'I think [leadership is] the ability to understand that you are working with other people as not every leader does. Being human, emotional intelligence.'

ML1 had observed a difference in how a female headteacher's decisions were accepted by the teaching body by comparison to her male predecessor. She also offered that this could have been due to the length of time in post. Wallace and Tomlinson (2010) indicate that this may be a factor as their findings suggest that capacity of leaders to influence colleagues increased over time. This aligns with the findings of Heilman and Okimoto (2007) who identified that women are perceived as less competent and rated lower by male subordinates.

ML1 'People are quite quick to call women out ... all the time people would be calling out her decisions and saying, "why are we doing this now? I don't think it's a good idea." Whereas the head they had before, which was a guy ... they would all go along with, "oh he knows what he is doing".'

ML1 observed that women in general took on a more assertive leadership style than men, perhaps in response to a poor level of acceptance by subordinates. This reflection was also made by SLT1 who identified that some women feel they must operate in an assertive way to emulate male leaders, but that wasn't the most effective form of leadership, and she feels she must ensure not to act in this way.

ML1 'Men seem to be far more backseat drivers... whereas women are quite confrontational and ... as if they've got the bull by the horns.'

SLT1 'females that feel they have to be harsh and severe and cut-throat ... almost like because that's how men do it ... and you don't, you just don't.'

Coleman (2007) identified that women leaders feel that they have to prove themselves possibly explaining why this style of leadership is employed. These observations potentially demonstrate that women leading in a transformational, 'masculine' way are perceived as being aggressive.

By contrast, Sealy and Singh (2010) propose that successful female leaders are able to navigate the duality of being accepted as feminine and also as an effective leader.

SLT1 'She is strong bold, has opinions about everything'.

ML1 'There were two women, they were like fierce. They would run the school so well and they were like hard, to the point but also really ... the stuff I learnt from them was incredible'.

The descriptions of influential female leaders provide some supporting evidence of women in senior leadership successfully managing to bridge both sets of expectations. This is supported by Wong, McKey, and Baxter (2018) who found the admired perceptions of leadership include vision, risk-taking and self-belief.

4.2.2 Discrimination

There is a notable difference in the way in which senior leader and middle leader participants experience responses to leadership based on their gender, with middle leaders less likely to describe incidents where they felt discriminated against. Potentially, female middle leaders work at a leadership position with lower level of gender discrepancy and therefore may have been exposed to less discrimination (DfE, 2022).

However, some incidents were described where they felt they were treated differently because they were female. One senior leader recalls an incident in which she was kissed on the lips by a male executive school leader on GCSE results day. A middle leader describes two occasions where their gender affected how they were treated by subordinates and members of the senior leadership team.

ML2 'There were comments within the SLT as to would we get enough work done as two friends and there would be gossip ... we basically got the impression that two women together in the office would not be amenable'.

ML2 'You still get a lot of sexism, particularly from technicians. Even now sometimes with the health and safety training for the machinery, because they are old school male teachers, occasionally you do get some misogynistic sexist comments from them as well, being female.'

In each instance described there was a sense of frustration expressed that the treatment was based on their gender. However, they did not identify themselves as victim and felt they had agency in

their responses. This aligns with Smith (2011), who suggested that women were not passive dupes and totally shaped by their forces of socialisation or workplace discrimination.

Despite being highly successful in their field and having worked at a senior leadership level for some time, all three senior leaders describe experiences of perceived gender-based discrimination. They describe school cultures in which gender stereotypes and societal expectations favour men to be capable of key senior leadership roles, particularly in challenging student behaviour (Coleman, 2020; Wong, McKey and Baxter, 2018). Two senior leader participants report that their gender was significant in their failure to secure a deputy headship position.

SLT1 'The feedback that I got there was, "you're very good, you clearly have got all the skills but, we've got an issue with big boys in corridors. We just can't quite see that you're ..." basically ... what they are saying is you're a small female ... I feel there was a gender aspect to it.'

SLT 2 'I think there is still a feeling of men being needed to deal with behaviour. I think that still exists, and I am sure it still exists in this school. I am sure the role that I have just gone for, that some people are really pleased the six-foot two man has been appointed because they think the man can sort it out.'

The concept that masculinity is required for effective behaviour management seems to be a throwback to times past when discipline was associated with physical intimidation (Coffey and Delamont, 2000). The recent experiences described by the senior leaders indicate that this association endures in the subconscious of decision makers on appointment panels (O'Connor, 2015). An alternative explanation is offered by Mavin and Grandy (2016), who suggest that women's physical appearance is considered along with their performance unlike men who are judged only on performance. It could be that simply appearing feminine creates a barrier to women's progress.

One female senior leader feels that although they do not perceive any discrimination based on their gender, they believe that they may face discrimination due to being a mother. She feels this to such an extent then when applying for a deputy head role she hid the fact that she had a child, deliberately controlling the narrative to give the panel the impression that she did not have a child. Whether this would have held her back or not is unclear even to another participant who was on the appointing panel.

SLT3 'I was quite careful in how I positioned the laptop, in no way did I say I was a parent, in no way did I say I was a solo parent because I thought it's not anybody's business, but I didn't want it to impact on whether they wanted to hire me.'

SLT1 'They thought that it would hold them back and I can't ... I was on the panel, and I can't tell you if that would have made a difference or not.'

The concerns described by SLT3 that her role as a mother could negatively impact her opportunity for promotion is potentially supported by research carried out by Cuddy et al. (2004) who suggest that gender stereotypes affect the perception of working mothers as being less competent than their childless counterparts. In addition, several authors found that mothers were less likely to secure an interview and be appointed to a new position (Firth, 1982; Fuegen et al., 2004; Heilman & Okimoto, 2008).

In answer to the first research question, it is apparent that although the women in this study perceive qualities of effective leadership as not being gendered, they identify that female leaders must enact leadership in appropriately feminine style of leadership if they are to be accepted (Coleman, 2020). Contrary to this belief, women do still currently experience gender-based discrimination when applying for senior leadership roles, where presenting as feminine is perceived as negative (Mavin and Grandy, 2016). This may become more significant if they are also mothers (Sealy and Singh, 2010).

4.3 Institutional aspect

RQ2 – *'What experiences enable and constrain women's ability to secure positions as secondary school senior leaders?'*

4.3.1 Work-life balance, parental responsibility, and career breaks

Although not limited to childcare, this is a dominant factor in the work-life balance for the women interviewed in this study. Middle and senior leader participants that are parents state that their role would not be possible without family support. The two middle leaders who are mothers cite childcare responsibility as a barrier to career progression, along with wider work-life balance. The

senior leader without children believes that she would not have been able to pursue her choice of career path had she been a mother.

SLT3 'I have nursery pick up that I have to get to ... I have negotiations on the other end when we have evening events and that's my mum, so I have to negotiate.'

ML2 'My mum, she's very supportive. I am lucky to have them both and they look after my kids. I wouldn't be where I am now without my parents looking after the children.'

SLT1 'As I didn't have children, I could go full on with my career in the early days.'

As Coleman (2020) identifies, the cultural assumption is that mothers are primarily responsible for childcare arrangements as is described by the participants in this study.

The three senior leaders highlight the expectation to attend evening events several times per week and the lack of flexibility within the education sector as incompatible with being a parent. One leader describes the challenge that they face combining work and motherhood. All three senior leaders reference a colleague that has 'burnt out' trying to balance the competing demands of being a mother and a senior leader.

*SLT3 'I have to work like I haven't a child and then be at home mumming as if I don't have a job and I know that's a perennial [problem]...I don't think teaching grows female leaders very well. I don't think teaching is even **vaguely** (emphasis in audio) compatible with family life.'*

SLT1 'I do feel a bit sad that I won't be a head and I've made that decision that I won't be a head and that's around work -life balance.'

SLT2 'Sadly though, she'd been in leadership for a long time, she'd been a deputy for a long time, and she was in her mid-40s but by 50 I think, she burnt out.'

These findings suggest that work-life balance and lack of flexibility in their working environment still pose a significant barrier to women's career progression as suggested by Kalaitzi et al. (2017). The difficulty in combining a career and being a parent do not appear to have significantly improved since Coleman's (2007) study. Female leaders within this context, who have children, still have the majority of parental responsibility; the exception being a leader whose partner is also female. These

findings align with those of Woodhouse (2016), Bruce-Golding (2019) and Coleman (2020) who suggest that parental responsibility is still largely considered the domain of mothers.

Career breaks due to maternity leave or concerns that they may have children in the future influenced the career decisions of two female middle leaders. During maternity leave one female senior leader elected to join senior leadership meetings online and to return from leave early. This may have been to limit interruption to their career pathway and replicate a more desirable 'masculine' pathway (Martinez, Lopez and Mateos de Cabo, 2021). The same leader also reports that they refused to go on maternity leave despite developing a pregnancy related condition. Upon returning from maternity leave, one middle leader discovered that her leadership role had been given to another member of staff on a permanent basis and that she had no role to return to. I would suggest this would be very unlikely to happen following paternity leave or a sabbatical taken by a male leader. She stated that losing her leadership role created a significant loss of confidence, identity, and aspiration. The relationship between experiences and self-efficacy is evident in this example.

ML 3 'I didn't apply for [role], in case I got pregnant quickly and had to go on maternity leave.'

ML 2 'I went on maternity leave, and I came back. They didn't have anywhere to put me when I came back because they replaced me with another person, they gave her a permanent contract ... so I was odd jobbing.'

4.3.2 Mentors and role models

There is a distinct difference between senior leaders and middle leaders in identification of mentors. All senior leaders cite a female mentor who had significant impact on their career progression with this relationship being sustained throughout their careers. No middle leaders discuss a mentor. This could indicate that mentoring has a substantial influence on women's progression into senior leadership.

SLT1 'So really a key influence would be the female deputy ... I keep in contact with her, I met her last week for a coffee because she is the biggest influence on my career without a doubt.'

SLT2 'The reason I am in senior leadership is because of a headteacher, a female head teacher. A really lovely forward thinking younger female head teacher came in and she saw something in me ... I am still in touch with her now, she transformed my thinking.'

SLT3 'She's my mentor, she's my person, still is. It is not unusual for me to phone on the way home and check something. Role model, mum, working mum ... made a massive impact.'

Coleman (2020) reported that mentoring was perceived as important for progressing women's careers but also once in the position of responsibility. The value of continued mentorship is demonstrated by all three senior leader participants.

All participants cite the importance of role models who are usually, but not exclusively, female. Relationships with role models were more distant, not sustained over time and not linked to leadership as they were with mentors. Role models in the form of assigned mentors and line-managers were sometimes rejected in favour of people they aspired to be like and who they could learn from.

ML2 'I tell you who I learnt a lot from, [female leader]. I thought she was a really strong leader; I learnt a lot from her ... and I did kind of aspire to be like her. She had the respect of the staff and the students. But at the same time, I worked with [female leader] and I swore I would never be like her, she was vile.'

The data suggests that self-selected role models and more significantly mentors are influential in facilitating women's ability to progress into senior leadership. This aligns with the findings of Smith (2011), Kalitzi (2017), Bruce-Golding (2019) and Coleman (2020) who also identify that the small number of women at the highest levels of leadership, is a limiting factor for promoting an environment for successful progression of women into senior leadership positions.

4.3.3 Opportunities

A theme common to the participants that had attained a senior leadership position was the opportunity to shadow or be seconded to a whole school leadership role. This was closely linked

with the mentor who either identified or created these opportunities. Likewise, two middle leaders indicated that they would like the opportunity to shadow and therefore gain experience.

SLT2 'Then [mentor] came in and I got seconded, secondment really helps. I was seconded to the SLT team, fully part of it, part of the core team.'

The difference in flexibility between contexts is highlighted by the vastly differing experiences of two middle leaders, one who had to relinquish their leadership position to work four days a week and another who was facilitated to manage their leadership role working 3 days a week and being remunerated with the full TLR value. These experiences substantially affected the leader's self-efficacy perception.

ML2 'That one year when I went part-time definitely held me back because I had to kind of give up half my position ... I think that held me back quite a bit and knocked my confidence a bit as well. Because, well I am good enough to do this job, it's only one day a week that I am not in school, I think I should be allowed to do it.'

ML3 'I was prepared to fight the case that I could do the job part time, but I didn't need to. He [headteacher] was the one who said to me we will pay you the full TLR value ... he believes in me.'

Two central experience themes emerge as being significant in enabling women to secure senior leadership positions: mentoring that includes advocacy and opportunities such as secondment. Mentoring relationships were observed to be long-lasting, with mentors playing a significant role in the creation of development opportunities such as secondments, and instrumental in identity formation and development of aspiration. The most significant barrier was managing work-life balance, predominantly identified as being caused by parental responsibilities and taking career breaks to have children. The findings corroborate the societal expectation for women to have the major responsibility for childcare. The more flexible the organisation was, in terms of working patterns and remuneration, *the* more successfully women were able to navigate the dual roles and the greater their self-efficacy and aspiration (Bruce-Golding, 2019)

4.4 Personal aspect

RQ 3 - *'What internal and external factors foster or inhibit aspiration to become a secondary school senior leader?'*

Aspiration varied widely amongst the group of participants and was connected to past experiences and identity developed throughout their lives. Half the participants describe themselves as ambitious and having a plan to achieve a senior leadership role, this is not limited to senior leader participants. Negative feedback from headteachers caused self-doubt and support from mentors fostered growing self-efficacy and ambition.

SLT1 'Very quickly I thought this is great I am going to make a career out of it. I always wanted to be a head, that was the only goal.'

ML2 'About halfway through my NQT year I went to speak to [line manager] and said I am interested in professional development and progressing. I was very ambitious at the time, still am, I want to climb the ladder quickly. I would like to be an assistant head, I would like to be on SLT eventually, that was my plan.'

SLT2 'An assistant head role came up and she [mentor] said I should apply and said I should be looking. I didn't get it but then she created a shadow SLT role which I did interview for and did get.'

Senior leader participants describe the role of mentors in generating development opportunities as significant for encouraging ambition. This suggests that mentors play a significant role in fostering self-efficacy and aspiration and mirrors the findings of Bruce-Golding (2019) who suggests that female leaders are more likely to have higher career aspiration if they encounter positive experiences along with career and personal support.

All senior leader participants note the lower self-efficacy demonstrated by women's reluctance to apply for a promotion until they have achieved the majority of the criteria for that position. This appears to be accepted as a social norm, as well as being experienced first-hand. This is not raised by middle leaders, perhaps because they work in a more gender representative level of leadership (DfE, 2020) or that they are not involved in the appointment of senior leadership candidates and therefore not as familiar with senior leadership job specifications.

SLT1 'I was at a deputy's conference, and we had a guest speaker ... and he described, you know the classic job description ... a female looks at it and says, oh I can't do that one, maybe I shouldn't, and a man looks at it and goes well I have kind of done that a bit, haven't done that bit ... I'll apply anyway.'

SLT3 'I've read these studies that say if you give a person specification to a man and they meet a third of it, then they feel they are going to apply. If you give it to a woman and she doesn't tick every box, then potentially she won't.'

SLT2 'we have 5 heads of year, 4 are men and two at least are very keen to get into leadership roles quite quickly. I'm thinking you need to calm down, you just need a little more experience. I never do with female staff because they already think they can't do it.'

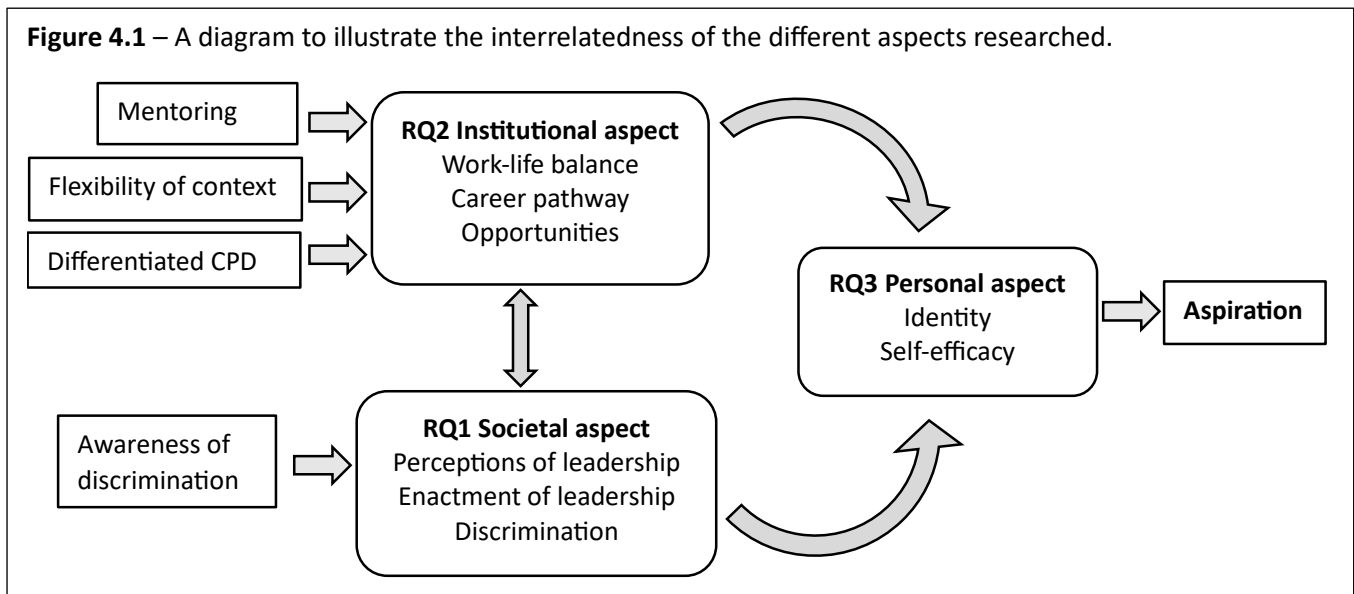
The observations made by the senior leaders are supported by the findings of several authors. Despite higher QMS scores, women have a lower self-efficacy rating and coupled with an aversion to risk taking fewer women apply for senior leadership roles. Those that do apply, ensure they have met far more of the criteria specified (Hoff and Mitchell, 2008; Wong, McKey and Baxter, 2018; Martinez, Lopez and Mateos de Cabo, 2021).

Van Esch, C. et al. (2018) suggest that moderately qualified women are perceived as riskier to employ at senior leadership level and that higher levels of qualification are seen to mitigate the perceived riskiness. One participant who progressed to deputy head level of senior leadership, actively sought progression, and was determined to create their own career narrative by seeking opportunities for professional development and gaining additional qualifications to doctorate level.

The factors that foster and inhibit aspiration are the life-long experiences of each participant and enable the construction of personal and professional identity. The self-efficacy and aspiration of the women in this study is an outcome of their varying opportunities for professional development and shaped by societal expectation. Some participants create a more agentic narrative and demonstrate greater aspiration (Smith, 2011). This is linked both to development opportunities but also due to experience outside of teaching.

4.5 Conclusion

Analysis of the interviews carried out with middle and senior leaders has identified significant barriers and facilitators that influence women's aspiration for senior leadership and their success in gaining senior leadership roles. In reality, societal aspects such as gendered enactment of leadership and opportunities are interrelated and influenced by context. Likewise, experiences of discrimination or professional development influence development of identity and self-efficacy. The interrelated factors identified in this study are conceptualised in Figure 4.1, with aspiration for senior leadership viewed as an emergent outcome. By attending to input factors such as mentors, flexible working opportunities, and differentiated professional development, I believe the organisation studied can develop more aspirant female leaders.



The findings of this study are summarised in Chapter 5, along with recommendations to inform senior leadership development programmes for the organisation and suggestions for further research.

Word count 4071

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

5.1 Introduction

This study has examined how the career histories of female leaders has influenced aspiration and success in gaining senior leadership positions. The analysis has identified dominant themes that have driven or necessitated career choices, which are experienced in a heterogeneous way for each leader. Although this chapter discusses the key themes in relation to the research questions, it was discovered that the societal and institutional aspects are interrelated, that they both inform development of identity and self-efficacy. Implications for leadership development within this organisation, limitations of the study and potential research opportunities are suggested.

5.2 Societal aspect – leadership as gendered

Two distinct narratives emerge from the data with middle leaders and senior leaders providing contrasting perspectives based on gender. Senior leaders describe experiences related to gender more distinctly, potentially because they work as a minority within senior leadership (DfE, 2020). Middle leaders have progressed to a leadership role more recently which may indicate that leadership environments are becoming more equitable.

This study identified that women experience leadership as gendered despite their belief that being a good leader is based on individual skills such as emotional intelligence, vision, integrity, and self-belief. Senior leaders describe challenges in gaining senior leadership positions based on their gender, of most significance is the perception that they are not strong or 'masculine' enough to manage student behaviour. This prejudice is observed to be a wider organisational cultural belief. It would also appear that there remains a prejudice from appointing panels against appointing mothers into senior leadership.

5.3 Institutional aspect - Mentors, Secondment and Work-life balance

Senior leaders each acknowledge the significant influence a female mentor has had throughout their career. Middle leaders did not identify mentoring relationships but did identify role-models who had a positive impact at different points in their careers. These relationships were not sustained throughout their career, in contrast to the enduring relationships between senior leaders

and their mentors. The lack of senior leaders available with whom middle leaders can develop mentoring relationships is a potential barrier to career progression, as is identified by Guihen(2019).

Secondment and opportunities to shadow senior leadership roles was recognised as invaluable in building expertise, self-efficacy, and success in attaining senior leadership roles by the three senior leaders in the study. Middle leaders indicated that they would like these type of opportunities as they do not feel that they can apply for senior leadership roles without evidence of experience at a whole school level.

The lack of flexibility and work-life balance of senior leadership is identified as a barrier to progression and a challenge for all the women in this study. Organisations that offer more flexible arrangements to allow women to work in leadership roles rather than force women to make the choice between career and a family are crucial in maintaining female leaders in the workforce. The flexible opportunities offered within this context were found to nurture aspiration and self-confidence that builds leadership capacity.

5.4 Personal aspect - aspiration and self-efficacy

Although aspiration and self-efficacy was proposed as a separate research question, this study has provided evidence to show that these cannot be separated from societal expectations and experiences provided by institutions. Although women have lower self-efficacy and are less likely to apply for leadership positions, this can be overcome. The role of a mentor is particularly significant in identifying and creating opportunities for aspirant female leaders. Likewise, organisations which invest in providing flexible opportunities and whole school leadership opportunities for women promote the development of self-confidence and leadership capacity. Aspiration for senior leadership progression is conceptualised as an outcome of individual's interpretation of societal and institutional aspects.

5.5 Implications for the organisation

The most significant theme that emerged was the role of mentors in the development of female senior leaders in schools. This context has a relatively high proportion of women in senior leadership which could facilitate a mentor or coaching programme to support the development of female leaders; currently this does not happen. The school is part of a federation of four LEA comprehensive schools and the federation offers some leadership training. Within the school several male middle leaders are completing NPQSL. However, these generic skills-based development programmes are insufficient as a method by which to advance female leaders, as they fail to consider the diverse motivations and experience of aspirant leaders (Guihen, 2019). Martínez et al. (2021) found that differentiated activities such as cross-mentoring, coaching, and networking were found to impact significantly on self-perception and confidence. Operating as part of the federation I would suggest the development of a network to mentor and develop aspirant female leaders.

Opportunities for secondment to senior leadership teams or job shadowing were cited as being invaluable in providing the whole school leadership experience that developed the self-confidence required to apply and attain a senior leadership position. Historically such work experience has been offered, this is not currently a model active in the school. Further to creating secondment opportunities and offering them to all aspirant leaders, talent spotting and advocacy for aspirant female leaders is recommended to ensure that low self-efficacy does not stop women from applying for such opportunities. Without this intervention, it may be predominantly men who seek these experiences and therefore the underrepresentation perpetuates. A senior member of staff who deliberately acts as an advocate for women has the power to foster self-belief and encourages the risk taking that is needed not only to apply for leadership roles but to enact them successfully.

5.6 Limitations and further research

The methods allowed appropriate data to be gathered to answer the research questions. However, this was a small-scale study based on interviews with six participants, therefore the findings are not widely generalisable. Further to this, not all experiences that informed the data gathered happened within this context. Similar research could be conducted within other schools in the federation to

establish if similar themes emerge. If findings are corroborated across the federation, they may be more widely applicable to other LEA secondary schools. Engaging in research within a team of researchers would facilitate individual identification of themes which would reduce researcher bias, confirming analysis.

Data gathered from middle leaders afforded few insights of leadership experiences that had influenced their aspiration, possibly due to limited leadership experience. A suggestion for future research would be purposive sampling of middle leaders with greater experience. Researching the individual development needs of middle leaders more widely within this context could inform a diversified programme of mentoring and networking for aspirant female leaders.

Word count 1084

Chapter 6: Narrative Critical Reflection

Reviewing my professional development plan, completed at the end of E812, two areas for development emerge. The first is to improve critical writing skills, this was a theme that resurfaced in the feedback from the first two assignments of the E822 course. The second area for development was a need to develop a greater understanding of the ethics, research methodologies and interpretation of findings needed to complete research of this nature. My EMA reflection grid can be found in Appendix 6.1.

Throughout the course I have found critically evaluating research articles a challenge. In part, I attribute this to my belief that as a novice researcher I was not qualified to have an opinion. To address this, I joined a 'Critical Thinking' workshop in the student hub online which helped me understand the process of writing critically (Open University, 2023a). As I read more articles, it became apparent that not only did researchers question the suggestions made by other authors, but they also contested them strongly and presented contradictory findings. I found that authors even went as far as to review, critique and improve previous findings of their own (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2020). In researching and writing a dissertation, it was necessary for me not only to develop critical thinking and writing but to represent my own perspective on issues. The one-to-one tutorials with my tutor were pivotal in helping me to appreciate that the dissertation was my own work and that I should develop my own voice. I now feel confident to state my interpretation of research and justify my own findings.

Having completed the ethical researcher course, I initially felt confident that I had considered all aspects of ethics. However, research interviews revealed far more personal stories than anticipated, which presented implications for future working relationships and dissemination of the findings. My tutor referred me to the work of MacFarlane, which helped me to understand that being a virtuous researcher wasn't a list of things to do but rather a way to be (Macfarlane, 2010). This is particularly important as I look to prepare a presentation to the Headteacher and Governors. Not only must I ensure that the best interests of participants are of the utmost importance, I will also need to show courage in presenting suggestions for development within the school.

It has taken a good proportion of the course for me to fully appreciate an interpretivist perspective. I am a chemist, and my previous experience of research has been highly controlled experimental

design. I now appreciate the value of small-scale interpretivist studies that are able to elicit the nuanced explanations behind the headline statistics, often the focus in schools. I feel I have the skills to carry out other similar studies in my organisation.

Ultimately the best preparation to complete a dissertation is to complete a dissertation. I am looking forward to putting my newly acquired research skills and knowledge gained from the entire course to use in my new role leading whole school professional development.

Word count 506

Total word count 12243

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Appendices

Appendix 3.1: Ethical Appraisal Form

E822 Ethical Appraisal Form

Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth



NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking 'in-person' data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols which should include seeking Gatekeeper permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhering to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.

Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, a completed version of this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation (SSI) and as part of the EMA submission for those completing an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal (EP) form of the Dissertation.

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research. For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all "no" you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor/supervisor can assess the proposed research.

Section 1: Project details

a.	Student name	Emma Catlow	
b.	PI	██████████	
c.	Project title	An investigation into women's perceptions of influences in aspiring and successful progression to secondary school senior leadership	
d.	Supervisor/tutor	Robert Melville	
e.	Qualification	Masters in Education	✓

		Masters in Childhood and Youth
f.	MA pathway (where applicable)	Leadership and Management in Education
g.	Intended start date for fieldwork	March 2023 (pending TMA02 proposal acceptance and return)
h.	Intended end date for fieldwork	May 2023
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If you are resident in the UK and will be conducting your research abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk for advice on travel.</i>	UK

Section 2: Ethics Assessment		Yes	No
1	Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a 'gatekeeper' (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?	✓	
2	Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a 'police check' or appropriate level of 'disclosure' before carrying out your research? ¹	✓	
3	Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. ²	✓	
4	Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in nonpublic places)? If so have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures? ³		✓

¹ You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure ('police check') can be obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

² This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. **No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers.** In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

³ Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. **Deception or covert**

5	Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through? ⁴		✓
6	Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so have you indicated how you will protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?	✓	
7	Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?	✓	
8	Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?		✓
9	Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants' confidentiality?		✓
10	Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a 'risk analysis' and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?		✓
11	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		✓
12	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?		✓

If you answered 'yes' to questions **12**, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (<http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/>).

collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

⁴ Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.

Appendix 3.2: Ethical Agreement Form



E822 Multidisciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth

E822 Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form

Return this completed form by the TMA01 cut-off date in November, by emailing a scanned version which makes clear the handwritten signatures to email address: WELS-ECYS-Masters@open.ac.uk, marked in the subject line 'For the attention of the E822 module team'. If you need to change your decision from an SSI to an EP at a later date this should be only after discussion with your tutor. A new version of this form should be completed and returned as above.

Student details	Name: Emma Catlow	PI number: L5504742
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Student declaration

I accept that the Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences of my actions in carrying out research as part of this dissertation module, which in particular relates to my decision to carry out the small-scale investigation format of this dissertation module.

Should I wish to carry out the small-scale investigation:

In order to explain the expectations of this module, I have shared the Letter to Setting Gatekeepers and Guidance for Setting Gatekeepers with the Setting Gatekeeper.

I agree to work with the Setting Gatekeeper and/or Supervisor to ensure that I adapt the processes and protocols supplied by the Open University to fulfil any legislative requirements and guidance relevant to that setting.

I understand that the setting will have expectations of me with respect to safeguarding practices related to interacting with participants who are aged under 18/vulnerable adults and the disclosure of criminal activities.

Should my participants be aged under 18/vulnerable adults, I have shared with the Setting Gatekeeper a copy of my Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced disclosure (DBS) certificate* (see page 3) (or equivalent for those outside the UK). If I do not have the stated certification, I have completed Annex 1 of this document and my Gatekeeper is happy that there will be safe arrangements for me to carry out data collection with participants aged under 18/vulnerable adults.

I commit to using both University and setting advice to support me in taking responsibility for completing my small-scale investigation safely for all involved, ensuring that the privacy, autonomy and dignity of individuals is preserved.

Please tick one of the boxes below:

1. I will be undertaking my data collection in a practice setting as part of a small-scale investigation (SSI) for my dissertation.	✓
2. I have decided not to complete data collection in a setting and will be conducting the extended literature review and proposal (EP) form of my dissertation.	

Signed:

Date:

If you have ticked box 1, please complete the following section in conjunction with a leader who will act as the gatekeeper to the setting. This should be someone who can confirm you have permission to conduct data collection in your chosen setting, and who is either willing themselves or able to identify for you someone willing to supervise your conduct while collecting data. (**See the Guidance for Setting Gatekeepers for further information about the role of a Setting Supervisor).**

If you are not planning to conduct research directly in a research setting, and do not need to request support from the setting (and this has been agreed with your tutor), sign as the gatekeeper. In these cases you are also signing to say that you will let the leaders of the setting know about your plans for research as a courtesy and offer them a chance to comment before you start your research.

Gatekeeper details	Name: [REDACTED]
	Position/role in setting: Headteacher
Setting details Secondary comprehensive Local Authority 11-18 school	
Setting address: [REDACTED]	
Postcode: [REDACTED]	

Practice-setting gatekeeper declaration – I give permission for Emma Catlow to carry out data collection as part of their masters’ multidisciplinary dissertation module E822, in [REDACTED] School. I will act in the role of supervisor** or have delegated this role to someone within the setting to oversee the data collection tasks they will undertake (interview, observation, documentation and/or questionnaire). I have read the Open University E822 Letter to Setting Gatekeepers and Guidance for Setting Gatekeepers. The student and I have discussed the guidance provided and I agree that procedures and protocols will be followed which ensure the research is undertaken ethically in this setting. Please tick one of the statements below:

- I am satisfied that Emma Catlow has the necessary disclosures (eg DBS) in place to work with participants under the age of 18/vulnerable adults.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Please print name: _____

Please complete this form and return pp. 1–2 to the E822 Module team by the TMA01 cut-off date in November. No data collection should be made unless a signed form has been returned declaring the agreed arrangements for this to take place. We will keep this form for 2 years from the start of your study on E822 and then destroy it. If you need to change your decision from an SSI to an EP at a later date this should be only after discussion with your tutor. A new version of this form should be completed and returned to the email address on p1.

***The Disclosure and Barring Service disclosure certification (or equivalent in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) must bear the same name as that given by you on p.1. Students in Scotland will also need to evidence that they meet the requirements of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme.** You must have a clear, enhanced DBS disclosure (or appropriate equivalent) which is current. It must be appropriate for the setting in which you intend to carry out your research and must be recent, i.e. within the last two years.

Annex 1: E822 Dissertation Ethical Agreement Self-Declaration

This form is an opportunity to self-declare and provide assurances that you do not pose a level of risk to others, in particular to those under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults, and should be completed if box 1 has been ticked on p.1 of this agreement for those unable to provide a clear DBS or national equivalent certificate. Annex 1 should be shared with the Setting Gatekeeper and should not be submitted in the documents returned to the University.

I confirm that (please tick the right-hand boxes as relevant to each statement):

I have no criminal convictions or conditional cautions considered to be unspent under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974***	✓
I have no spent cautions (reprimands or warnings) and convictions for serious violent and sexual offences or other offences of relevance for posts concerned with safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, nor any convictions resulting in a custodial sentence, whether or not suspended.	✓
To my knowledge there is no information held by the authorities that would be considered relevant to working with children and young people under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults.	✓
To my knowledge I am not on any barred lists of people not considered suitable for working with children and young people under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults.	✓

***The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 aims to give those with convictions or cautions the chance in certain circumstances to start afresh. Under the Act, eligible convictions or cautions become 'spent' after a specified period of time known as the 'rehabilitation period', the length of which varies depending on how the individual was dealt with. You can refer to the relevant extract from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 explaining rehabilitation periods at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01841/SN01841.pdf> and criteria by which offences will be filtered from official Disclosure and Barring Service Checks, on which this form is based, at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/filtering-rules-for-criminal-record-check-certificates/filtering-rules-for-dbs-certificates-criminal-record-checks>

The wording of this form has been guided by that taken from the Disclosure and Barring Service website, in particular from the Sample Policy for the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-sample-policy-on-the-recruitment-of-ex-offenders/sample-policy-on-the-recruitment-of-ex-offenders> and Checking Someone's Criminal Record as an Employer <https://www.gov.uk/dbs-check-applicant-criminal-record>

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 3.3: Information letter for participants

E822 Information letter for adults (aged over 18): Interviews

What is the aim of this interview?

The aim of the interview is to gain an individual's perspective on an aspect of education, childhood and youth studies as part of a small-scale investigation for a Masters qualification designed to contribute to knowledge and practice in my chosen area of specialism. This particular interview is designed to help answer 'An investigation into women's perceptions of leadership and the factors that influence aspiration and progression into secondary school senior leadership.'

Who is conducting the research and who is it for?

This interview is part of my studies on the Open University Masters module E822 'Multi-disciplinary dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth'. On this module I have an opportunity to design a small-scale investigation which will generate findings relevant to and of value to practice settings. The interview has been agreed with my tutor to be an important part of this design to allow me to include the perspectives of selected participants in addressing the above research question. I will be analysing the data collected and reporting my findings in the dissertation I submit to the University as my final assessment for my Masters qualification.

Why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been chosen as your experiences and opinions would be highly valuable in helping to address a question which is considered one which will have value for your setting and others like it.

If I take part in this research, what will be involved?

The interview is intended to last no longer than 30 minutes and a place which I will negotiate with you and others in the setting to be mutually convenient. This might include an online interview setting. If there is anyone else affected by the interview, such as a member of staff, they will also have been consulted about when would be a convenient time and permission has been granted from Head Teacher. If we will be using video conferencing software for the interview, you can choose whether to use your video and show your face or not. I would like to ask your consent to make an audio recording of our discussion so that I can refer back to what was said more accurately than would be possible just from my notes. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, I will accept your wish, and rely only on my written notes. Only I will have access to the audio recording. I do not need to share this with those at the University or in this practice setting. I will transcribe and anonymise the interview before sharing any part of this with my tutor or it form part of the final dissertation. Your contribution will be recognised by code. Any other real names referred to during the interview will be removed and renamed.

What will we be talking about?

The focus of the interview will be to find out your perspective on how career experiences have influenced your aspiration and success in becoming a senior leader in a secondary school I can share the questions with you in advance, if you would like.

Will what I say be kept confidential?

Your participation will be treated in **strict confidence** in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). No personal information will be passed from me to anyone else. Your consent forms will be stored safely in our professional setting as agreed with the senior leader overseeing the safe conduct of this research. In the case of the audio recording and my notes of the interview, these will be kept confidential and typed up as soon as possible. However, if you disclose anything during your interview which I consider means that you might be unsafe or have been involved in a criminal act, because this is a safeguarding concern, I will need to pass this immediately to the organizational Designated Safeguarding Officer. The anonymised records of the interview will be stored securely on password protected devices and the original notes and recording will then be destroyed. I will be submitting an analysis of the data collected from the interviews as part of my dissertation submitted as the end-of-module assessment. I also plan to present my findings to relevant audiences. I can confirm that neither you as an individual nor the setting will be identifiable in any of these reports and presentations.

What happens now?

After reading this information sheet, please review and complete the consent form. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any point up by letting me know, until the time I am using your data in my University assessments. As soon as you let me know you wish to withdraw, your consent forms and any data collected will be destroyed upon assessment completing, expected January 2014.

What if I have other questions?

If you have any other questions about the study I would be very happy to answer them. Please contact me at [REDACTED]

Appendix 3.5: Interview questions

As indicated in Chapter 3, research questions listed below were only needed as prompts. Interviews progressed with only a few open questions.

1. Are you able to tell me about how you got to be in your current role?
2. Can you tell me about leaders that have influenced you during your career.

Initial research questions

What are individual women's perspectives on secondary school senior leadership, drawing on their experiences?

- Can you tell me a bit about leaders that would have worked with throughout your career – have any influenced your leadership strategies?
- Did you always want to have a leadership position in a school? Can you tell me a little about how you ended up in this role?

What internal/external factors foster an aspiration to become a secondary school senior leader?

- Are there any people or experiences that helped you gain a leadership role?
- What other leadership roles have you held?
- Did you always want to have this role? Is it what you expected?
- What influenced you to apply? Were there other roles that you decided not to apply for?
- Can you think of any examples or situations that influenced to apply or not apply for roles?

What experiences enable women to secure positions as secondary school senior leaders?

- How do you decide what roles you will apply for?
- Can you think of experiences/people that have helped you successfully gain leadership positions?
- Are there any roles that you didn't get – why do you think that was and how did it affect your career/confidence?

What barriers have women experienced in their development or aspiration to become a secondary school senior leader?

- Can you think of experiences/situations that have held you back?
- Have you ever had a career break? How has that affected your career?
- Do you feel that you would have had a different career if you were a man?

To what extent do female leaders experience and enact leadership as gendered?

- Reflecting on leaders you have worked with, have you noticed any difference in how leadership enacted by men and women?
- Does this affect how you enact leadership?

Appendix 3.6: Data protection plan

Data resource	Type of data	Participants	Where is the data stored?	Comments
Interview notes	Handwritten notes	Interviewees	Paper copy - handwritten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer to word document and store on personal laptop and OneDrive. • Laptop and OneDrive both password locked. • Data not stored on school network. • Codes to protect identities of participants and any persons and contexts identified during interview.
Interview recordings	Recording on phone	Interviewees	Initially on phone then laptop/cloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upload to audio file on laptop and then ensure saved on OneDrive. • Delete audio files once transcript and analysis completed. • Data password locked on phone, laptop and OneDrive. • Data not stored on school network.
Interview transcript	Typed word document	Interviewees	On laptop and OneDrive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data password locked. • Data not stored on school network. • Codes to protect identities of participants and any persons and contexts identified during interview.

Appendix 3.7: Sample of thematic coding

Text location	Summary - first analysis	Review of theme	Theme	Link to RQ
1	Key influence deputy head still in contact with her - shaped me. Strong, bold has opinions	Female role model	role model	2
2	Female DHT suggesting applying for roles and giving feedback	Female mentor - coaching	role model	2
3	Assistant head of year	Opportunity to shadow	opportunities	2
4	Travelling as an experience ignited aspiration	wider experience		
5	Male DHT interim - Ofsted. Rallying cry and example of how to get team together to work towards a purpose. Saw qualities	Example of leadership - male but inspirational	leadership styles - perception	1
6	As teacher found negative experiences	Identification that leadership works in different ways for different tasks	leadership styles	1
7	Something about leadership and how you get people behind you.	Example of leadership - male but inspirational	leadership styles	1
8	First female head destroyed everything - was assistant head after 8 years on temporary contract	Negative example of leadership Example of opportunity prior to this	leadership	1
9	Told that had been at school too long, time to move on.	Negative experience with female head - affected confidence	self-efficacy	3
10	All women removed from SLT by female HT	Example of questionable female leadership - motivation? Moral leadership?	leadership	1
11	Poor reference written by email HT - not representative of person interviewed.		leadership	1
12	Male HT learnt a lot about leadership - compassion. Typically, a female leadership attribute?	Leadership examples	gendered	1

Appendix 3.8: Sample of thematic memoing

RQ	Theme	Summary	Discussion/other ideas	Link
1	Perceptions of leadership	<p>Leadership can be good or bad irrespective of gender - similar qualities admired in men and women with the idea that good leaders understand what it is to 'be human'. However, clearly some 'masculine' traits exhibited by women were perceived as negative, whilst some 'feminine' traits demonstrated by men were admired and influential.</p> <p><i>Two participants from two different prior organisations noted the removal and absence of any female senior leaders following the appointment of a female head teacher, this impacted aspiration as it was made clear there would be no opportunity for development at that school.</i></p> <p>SLT 1, 2 and 3 identify examples influential male and female leaders. ML1 identifies what made female leader effective, ML2 noted good and bad leadership. ML 3 noted an absence of leadership - leading to a desire to develop their own leadership. They sought recognition and didn't get it.</p> <p>ML1 noted an overall difference in leadership style of women, (taking on traits perceived as being more masculine? - supported by SLT1. Described as 'XXXX breakers' is that because they feel they need to be? ML1 also identified that women were second guessed but men authority accepted without question ... links to issues with behaviour only being managed by men?</p>	<p>Is it the leadership style rather than the leader that is important. Do we admire different qualities in male and female leaders? i.e., compassion in a male and confidence/opinion in a female?</p> <p>However, ML 1 also identified men as 'back seat drivers' and said women not followed and men were without question. Maybe this was why they feel they have to be more 'direct/strong' ?</p>	<p>ML3 identified an absence of leadership that led to an aspiration to be better but does NOT aspire to SLT, in fact suggests that aspiration for succession is not admirable.</p>

Appendix 4.1: Participant summary

Participant	Leadership position	Time in post	Part time/Full time	Responsibility for childcare
SLT 1	Deputy Head	9 years	FT	No children
SLT 2	Assistant Head	9 years	FT	Partner has main responsibility
SLT 3	Deputy Head	1 year 2 terms	FT	Supported by family
ML 1	Head of Department	2 terms	FT	No children
ML 2	Head of Department	3 years	FT	Shared with partner and supported by family
ML 3	Head of Department	1 year 1 term	PT	Shared with partner who is also part time

Appendix 6.1: EMA Reflection grid

Category	Feedback received, targets achieved, and areas of development worked on	How did this shape my dissertation
<p>Knowledge and understanding: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to knowledge of current debate and issues in your specific area of focus; drawing out concepts and themes; choosing a focus area for your dissertation; identifying and overcoming ethical issues.</p>	<p>The chapter touch on ethical considerations related to data collection, but a detailed discussion of how ethical issues impacted various research decisions will be in the methodology chapter. It is essential to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ethical considerations influenced your research decisions and demonstrate your commitment to conducting research ethically and responsibly. At the end of each aspect, consider adding a brief synthesis that connects the discussed themes to the research question and the broader context of women's leadership. It can help reinforce the significance of the findings and their implications.</p>	<p>I had completed the ethical researcher course (twice) and felt that I had considered all aspects of ethics. However, the interviews all revealed far more personal stories than I expected to hear, which then changed the dynamic of working relationships with participants. Following discussion with my tutor, he referred me to Bruce MacFarlane. I located and read several articles by the author, which helped me to understand that being a virtuous researcher wasn't a list of things to do but rather a way to be. This is particularly important as I look to prepare a presentation to the Headteacher and Governors. Not only will I need to ensure that the best interests of participants are of the utmost importance, I will also need to show courage in presenting suggestions for development within the school.</p>
<p>Critical analysis and evaluation: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to justifying or challenging your personal perspective; interpreting and critically analysing evidence and methodologies from your own and others' research; analysing and evaluating themes and issues; sourcing and critically reviewing a wide range of publications; creating an academic argument using synthesis; comparing and</p>	<p>Draft Chapter 1: Make sure you put yourself forward in presenting ideas and use the literature to back your thoughts.</p> <p>The important thing is not to use the literature to make your argument for you. It can contextualise your research questions. It can also enable you to reflect on how leadership operates in practice. Remember that it is your argument, and you use the literature to show how you refine your thinking.</p> <p>Draft chapter 3: Review how you link your analysis to your research questions, showing how each aspect</p>	<p>Throughout the course I have found that I can tend towards a descriptive rather than critical analysis of literature or my research process. Following early feedback, I enrolled on a 'critical writing' online course with the OU. I also used my dissertation journal to make notes when I read articles, attended courses, and received feedback from my tutor. Throughout the course I have felt that as something was written in academic journal that it must be correct, and I did not feel qualified to question the work. I do now see that other author question proposals and that they indeed also question their own previous work.</p>

<p>connecting practice and theory.</p>	<p>contributes to answering these questions.</p>	<p>It has been a struggle to find my own voice throughout the dissertation module as this is a very different way of writing. I have developed confidence throughout the course, particularly through the 1-2-1 tutorials with my tutor and during the small group discussions in the tutorial sessions.</p> <p>Throughout the analysis of data, I found that themes were connected and created a diagram that showed how I conceptualised the influence of each theme. I also found creating a diagram that showed the thematic analysis process that I used very helpful tool to explain how I had carried out the analysis process. Prior to the dissertation, I did not feel that I was sufficiently qualified to suggest how concepts or themes were might be conceptualised.</p>
<p>Links to professional practice: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to: designing and/or applying research methods; developing ideas from previous research and frameworks; reflecting and making adaptations during the research and writing process; addressing problems in research design; identifying implications for practice and professional debate; challenging your own assumptions; managing workload and personal motivation.</p>	<p>There is still scope for refinement in presenting your ideas, particularly concerning your discussion of the link between the methodology and methods. When revising the methodology discussion, you should have scope to link the methodology and data collection methods. The chapter touches on practical implications by discussing the impact of findings on leadership development programs. You could expand on this in your concluding chapter by providing more specific practice recommendations based on the research insights. Further emphasis on how the identified barriers and facilitators align with real-world scenarios would strengthen the practical relevance of the research. Review how you link your analysis to your research questions, showing how each aspect contributes to answering these questions.</p>	<p>Although I had understood the reasons for adopting selecting a research design, I had not explained how literature researched had informed my own planning. It has taken a good proportion of the course for me to fully appreciate an interpretivist perspective. I am a chemist and all research in my experience is carried out with a highly controlled experimental design. All data is quantitative and not open to interpretation by different researcher. I now appreciate the value of small-scale interpretivist studies that are able to elicit the fine detailed, nuanced explanations for the large-scale quantitative observations that are often made in education. I feel I have the skills to carry out other studies in my organisation.</p> <p>I believe that the work I have undertaken in completing this research coupled with my understanding of leadership and</p>

		<p>professional development gained throughout the three years, will ensure that findings will be used to develop aspirant female leaders in my context. Findings will be presented to the Governors and Senior Leadership team next term.</p>
<p>Structure, communication and presentation: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to using academic style and referencing; presenting, managing and sharing information in different modes; communicating concepts, findings and ideas for different audiences.</p>	<p>Draft chapter feedback: When you come to produce your reference list, include the date of access and the URL for all works you accessed online (approximately if necessary). As you develop the dissertation, consider the entity as an integrated piece of work. Each chapter has a role to play in the dissertation as an entity in addition to presenting specific aspects (for instance, introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and conclusion). In terms of the discussion of the data analysis, you are setting out your approach as a researcher. It forms the basis for the detailed analysis in the next chapter.</p>	<p>I received positive feedback on the academic tone adopted and referencing following final draft chapter submission.</p> <p>My chosen method of using hard copy of papers for reading, created challenges in finding quotes and referencing articles throughout the three years of study. To improve this, I created a grid to summarise key points that included the correct reference for each document. This reduced time rereading and locating references.</p> <p>A significant challenge was writing a dissertation that worked as a whole rather than as individual chapters. This overview was only really possible once all chapters had been written and refined several times.</p>