

**Situated constraints and opportunities for
women in attaining the position of
headteacher**

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Abstract

This research explores why women have been failing to gain headship in a particular geographical area in which the researcher herself worked in a senior school leadership position. It considers existing research on women and headships, together with feminist accounts of women's position in society and education. It draws on feminist research traditions to make explicit the motivation for locating the project within a feminist paradigm. By highlighting the issues faced by a group of women striving to achieve headship positions through extended interviews influenced by narrative approaches, the research seeks to contribute to the current debate into the still under-researched topic of women into school leadership. The study demonstrates that gender is and continues to be a constraint facing women who seek to challenge the still largely male domain of secondary headship. The idea of identity and power are central to the research analysis and findings. The study contributes both to academic research in this field but also to the researcher's own professional knowledge in order to arrive at a better understanding of the opportunity and constraints faced by women seeking leadership positions in schools.

CHAPTER ONE

FRAMING THE CONTEXT

1.1 What prompted my research?

This research study considers the reasons why disproportionately fewer women reach the position of headteacher in secondary schools by focusing on the issue from the perspective of a case study of selected women holding senior positions in secondary schools in a small Midland town. The project investigates the reason for this situation and suggests why there is such a high proportion of male headteachers in this particular town. As the researcher, I set out to find if there were any specific features peculiar to this area that have resulted in this situation existing over such a long period of time. Here, it is not a case of under representation in the headship, but of no female representation at all. However, I do not intend to take an entirely negative stance but to widen the debate to consider the opportunities that also could be opened to women. I hope my experiences, combined with those of the women I interviewed, will help reflection on the differences and similarities we have experienced, thus generating a deeper understanding of the issue.

I therefore examine women's positions in the schools in a specific educational district where I myself work. By adding to the existing knowledge surrounding women into headship, I hope to foster a better understanding of the problem faced by women that might point a way forward to securing a fairer access into headship. This may be viewed as an optimistic aim, but I am nevertheless encouraged by Paechter (2001) when she asserts that we do have the power to bring about change, albeit over a longer, rather than a shorter, period of time. I recognise that there is no realistic possibility of a massive gender revolution where women will predominately succeed to the headship of the schools in the town in the short term. However, by challenging male dominance in the

workplace it may be possible to shift the present agenda. By persuading those with influence, be it in the Local Education Authority or selection panels, to recognise the gender inequality that exists, I may be able to suggest strategies that could ultimately bring about change.

1.2 Autobiographical reflection

I begin by presenting my own personal experience as a career teacher. From the outset I want to make it explicit that I will not be claiming any generalisations from this experience, but hope it will resonate with the experience of women who are also aspiring to leadership positions. I seek in this dissertation to integrate research and the particularities of my own professional situation and to generate professional learning through research, as well as scholarship and professional knowledge.

Thirty-seven years ago I entered the teaching profession as a History teacher, in a secondary school in the Midlands knowing I wanted to pursue a teaching and leadership career. There was little professional development offered after the probationary year. I did not have a clear career path and little idea about just how I would progress up the promotional ladder. The first step came after spending three years in my first teaching post, when a woman who had begun her career at the same time as I had was promoted. She happened to be an English teacher; and the head of department had retired. She applied for the post, and was successful. I realised that I had gained similar expertise in my own subject area and that I too had the potential to lead a department. I decided to apply and was successful in obtaining a post in my subject area in another local school. Over the next few years I moved school again in order to lead a larger department, and eventually decided to apply for more senior management responsibilities.

Moving upwards was a gruelling experience. Women formed the majority of the teaching force and yet few were in leadership positions. I was often the only

female candidate in the interviews, and the questions always focused on my gender. How would I cope with unruly boys? Had I any plans to have a family, and if so when? The realisation dawned that men seemed to have an advantage in this profession. If I wanted to succeed I would have to be persistent. I also realised that if I applied for pastoral posts rather than academic posts then I was more likely to be successful. At that time, and to some extent even now, pastoral posts that carry responsibilities for personal, social and health issues are perceived as suitable for women, as it fits what is perceived by some as their caring role.

I believed those posts that carried a responsibility for girls' welfare would provide me with a route into a senior management position. The much more prestigious post, that of curriculum deputy, was usually given to a man. Eventually I applied for headship, and the situation was even more marked. By now, the questions had changed but the mindset of the appointing panels appeared to have remained the same. For example, I was asked: How would I cope with difficult parents? How would I cope if there was a fight during the lunch hour? The implication being: Would I as a woman be able to manage aggressive situations? It was then I began to look around and found that in this small town in the Midlands, all the heads were men. I discovered that this had been the case for over thirty years. The last female head had been in post at the Girls' Grammar School. In 1972 this school was reorganised, became a co-educational comprehensive school, and a male head was appointed. I was aware of the marked gender disparities in headships and headship opportunities. It felt deeply unfair, but while I experienced this as an everyday exclusion, I lacked the theoretical perspectives to explain the nature of the problem.

Embarking on the Doctorate of Education in 2002 I discovered the situation was not only repeated nationally but internationally. My interest was aroused when I looked at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) statistics covering the school workforce in England and Wales. The most recent figures show that

68.8% of headships are held by men compared with 31.2% for women, despite the fact that women still form the majority of teachers, 54.3% in the secondary sector (DfES, 2004). In 1998 the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) reported that there had been a 7% fall in the number of male teachers and an increase of 2% in the number of women teachers. They also noted that the proportion of female headteachers appointed to schools serving disadvantaged areas was higher than for schools nationally. I would speculate that male colleagues do not want to apply for these posts because they are often perceived to be 'failing schools'. The women interviewed in my study certainly believed that they might gain headship posts in disadvantaged areas, as these posts appear less attractive to men.

Explanations for the under-representation of women in headships have shifted over time. In the 1980s the under-representation of women in headship positions was explained and even justified in terms of women's deficiencies (Acker, 1994). In her critical appraisal of women's careers, Acker (1994) showed that researchers at the time portrayed women as unsuitable for leadership in terms of qualifications and motivation. By 2001, Grathan (2001) in her research project on women in senior management was arguing that this deficiency model was flawed and no longer acceptable. From the late 1980's female researchers began to focus on this under-representation and to look to gender differences as a possible reason. It has now been clearly demonstrated that gender discrimination is instrumental in women's failure to reach top positions in schools (Adler et al. 1993; Ouston, 1993; Schmuck, 1987; Shakeshaft, 1989). Throughout Western Europe, North America, and Australia the same picture emerges. Ruijs (1993) has shown that although 50% of teachers are women in Europe, there has been a downward trend in women succeeding to headship. What is particularly surprising is that countries with good social provision and explicit policies for women, namely Denmark, Holland and Sweden, have the poorest representation of women in senior posts.

Yet, despite the introduction of equal opportunities legislation in the 1970s, it would seem nothing has radically changed. The numbers of women in headship has increased, but only slowly. The DfES (2004) figures suggest over the last ten years the number of women obtaining headship has only risen by 8%. It could be argued that this is in some respects a result of the changes in our educational system. The 1988 Reform Act brought about a significant and radical change to the role of headteacher. This act obliged headteachers to share with their governing bodies responsibility for the local management of their schools. Decentralisation and greater autonomy may, however, have favoured more masculine styles of management. Evetts (1990) criticised the changes brought in by this act because she saw them establishing management approaches that could present cultural dilemmas for female headteachers. In her opinion women would need to be autocratic, competitive and aggressive in order to meet the requirements of these reforms. The changes in the Act included the delegation of budgets to schools, staff appraisal, open enrolment and greater parental choice. At the same time came the introduction of the National Curriculum and national testing in the form of Standard Assessment Tasks/Tests. According to Hall (1996) many of the head teachers appointed prior to the 1988 Act were ill equipped to meet the demands and challenges it represented. There was an increase in early retirement of head teachers. However, women did not benefit from this situation to any significant extent as a new breed of male head teachers was appointed.

It was this situation that sparked further enthusiasm for my research project. I believe that women should have equity when striving for the most senior positions in school. It is an issue of social justice, too: women have a right to have their potential and expertise recognised by those responsible for appointing headteachers. To deny them their share in positions of authority should be a cause for concern amongst the policy makers, Local Education Authority Officers and selection panels. In the 21st century we can no longer afford to

waste the talents women would bring to leadership positions; a more diverse population of head teachers would enrich the profession.

1.3 Excluding women

The literature dealing with educational leadership and management, until recently, assumed that all managers were male. At this point it is not my intention to comprehensively review research on gender and school leadership: this I do in chapter two. Nor is it my intention to review the field of leadership in schools in general, although I may focus on this where it is relevant to the study. My study addresses the specificity of gender and access to headship rather than the practice of headship more broadly.

What I do wish to do now is to touch briefly on a few key features of the gender and school leadership literature to situate my research questions and show that they flow both from my own professional experiences and from reviewing the literature. Adler et al. (1993) in their book on school management noted that most of the current literature refers to managers as 'he'. Gender differences were largely ignored; men and women were assumed to be the same. Hall (1993) found in her review of 140 articles that only five showed any awareness of gender. This is perhaps not surprising as she states over 80% of them were written by men. Connell (2002) describes this as the 'patriarchal dividend'. Gender is significant for men in the way that it privileges them; they may not be aware of this from their position of power, so it is significant for them, but not significant to them. Gender is certainly a significant issue for women seeking promotion in schools.

Over two decades ago that Schmuck (1987) made a plea for women to be included in the concept of leadership. It is perhaps also worth noting at least some authors who have concentrated on women's issues have seen their own academic careers marginalised in their institutions. Marshall (1986) alludes to this in her study on women managers:

I was wary, however, of becoming too involved with women's studies because of the stigma it seemed to carry.

(Marshall 1986: 198)

Leadership and the exercise of power is potentially problematic, and Blackmore, (1999) by adopting a feminist, post-structuralist lens, has provided a view of leadership and power from a useful and generative perspective. Gender issues form a central part of her thesis. She has challenged privileging power structures and the way current leadership theories and models help to sustain them. She has encouraged me to rethink power and leadership in schools, and ultimately challenge male domination of headship. My own study will examine paternalistic and patriarchal discourses, as I consider these to be relevant. This, I believe, accounts for women's continued subordination in the workforce. Indeed, Luke and Gore (1992) identify this as a central issue:

Patriarchal knowledge is the scaffold that supports the structural, organisational, differential valuation of women and men, it serves to validate sexist knowledges. Institutionalised gender inequalities marked by differentiated valuation of women and men's work, speech and power, reflect patriarchal knowledges.

(Luke and Gore 1992: 196)

If we accept this statement, then it follows that we have to try to influence those responsible for the appointments of headteachers. Over the past seven years vacancies for headships have occurred in the educational district within which I work, and yet in 2006 we still await the appointment of a female head. Despite the fact that the Local Education Authority has in place a well-established equal opportunities policy which is intended to encourage women to apply for headship posts unfortunately it does not seem to have had any major impact. This suggests that good intentions and policies are not enough to counteract the patriarchal values and structures that still exist in our society. The problem remains that we not only have to pay lip service to equal opportunities, but also need to convince those responsible for appointing headteachers that women do have the skills for leadership.

1.4 The research questions

My research sets out to consider the reasons why there are disproportionately fewer women reaching the position of headteacher in the secondary sector of education. The study focuses on the issue from the perspective of one small Midland town of which I have 'insider' experience and knowledge. It was apparent that the situation in this town not only mirrored the situation of the under representation of women nationally, but did so to a greater extent. In other districts within the Local Education Authority (LEA) there were, in fact, women headteachers, albeit a minority.

It was my intention to ascertain whether the women I interviewed considered their gender to be a significant constraint when applying for headship positions. Gendered identity will therefore be a central issue in this research. If we accept inequality is a product of gender relations and begin to address this issue, then it may be possible to negotiate ways in which women can gain access to these positions of power, usually occupied by men.

The research questions I addressed were:

- 1) What individual/biographical factors deter or encourage women?
- 2) What institutional or regional factors deter or encourage women from seeking leadership in schools?
- 3) In what ways are structures of gender and gendered relations a significant factor?
- 4) How do we account for the constraints and opportunities facing prospective women headteachers?
- 5) How can women secure fairer access to headship positions?

1.5 Locating the study

To give a flavour of where this small scale qualitative research study was conducted I include a brief description of the area. It has a population of

103,000, evenly split by gender, 48.8% male and 51.2% female. The 2001 census shows that 96% of the population is white; 4% are from other ethnic backgrounds; 2.5% of which are Pakistani. The census also reveals that the town has some of the poorest qualification bases in the country; over 43% of the population (16-74 years olds) have no qualifications compared to an England and Wales average of 29.1%. In addition, only 7.8% have qualified to degree level while the national average is 19.8%. The main employment opportunities within the area are centred upon retail logistics and the paper making industry. There has been a steep decline in manufacturing, engineering and the mining industries over the last 25 years (Learning and Skills Council, 2003).

The main providers of post-primary education in the area (2004) are six high schools and a college of further education. All of these educational establishments have been led by a succession of male headteachers and principals for the last 32 years. In addition, the local education authority representatives, district inspectors and officers, are predominantly male.

There are limited theatre and cultural activities within the town. Those that do exist are largely confined to community projects and amateur groups.

Interestingly enough, all the secondary headteachers, with one exception, live outside the area, where there are opportunities to visit theatres, the opera and the ballet. In addition, the places where they have chosen to live offer a greater variety of leisure and sporting facilities. However, there is within the town a long-established club that restricts its membership to male professionals. A substantial percentage of representatives on local school governing bodies, including the headteachers, are members of this club.

1.6 The interviews

I began my field work in October 2004 by conducting a series of interviews, and these were completed by March 2005. The group interviewed included two

female heads, four female deputy heads, two female heads of departments, a male head and a female chair of governors. The criteria for selection was that these women were actively seeking promotion and that access to them would not be problematic. The chair of governors, I anticipated, would offer a different perspective on the research questions. The ages of eight of the ten people interviewed was between 45 and 55; the two heads of department were in their early 30s. With the exception of the two female heads they all worked in the town. Five of the group came from one school. The in-depth interviews, lasting around two hours for each, were spread over a period of six months, taking place at times chosen by the participants. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in full. Of the ten people interviewed, only three were unknown to me. The advantages and disadvantages of this will be discussed in a later chapter. The study is almost entirely viewed from a female perspective. I would suggest that, because women often feel excluded, they see things from a different perspective, enabling them to view experiences through a double lens. They see the female view, but also have an awareness of how the world looks through more privileged male eyes.

The male headteacher was chosen because I felt I needed to include the views of a headteacher who was in post in this area, to ascertain his views on the under-representation of women. I deliberately selected a head who appeared to have a more gender-inclusive approach. If there were gender problems around his approach, I might then speculate that the situation could be worse elsewhere. At the time of writing there is still no woman in a headship position within the town. The two female heads had worked in the town but, having failed to get a headship here, moved and were then successful. The two younger women were included to enable me to consider whether their experiences were different from those of the older women in the study. I discuss this in detail in chapters four and five.

1.7 A narrative methodology and theoretical frames

I detail my methodology and methods in chapter three. Suffice to note here that the approach is narrative, rather than life history. Plummer (2001) usefully shows that life history involves establishing and maintaining a close intimate relationship with one's subjects, often meeting them each week over a number of years. An important feature in life history is that it must involve a series of interviews. I realised that the constraints of time and lack of resources would make a life history approach impossible for me as a part-time researcher. My approach focuses on the stories of women's lives and seeks to represent their voices on their experiences into leadership. I was convinced in-depth, unstructured interviews would allow the participants to present their experiences in the context of their wider lives, and so enable me to explore in greater detail the complexities which have influenced their careers. I wanted to explore the early childhood and career experiences that had shaped the women's beliefs and values; firstly as teachers and secondly as managers. What influences and role models had led them to follow their individual career paths? Were these women encouraged by their partners or helped by role models? Why were they motivated to move towards securing headship posts? And were there any key events or times in their lives that had led them to apply for headship? How did they perceive headteachers' power and authority? What barriers had they faced when pursuing their careers, and what strategies, if any, had they developed to overcome these barriers and constraints?

Munro (1998) suggests that narrative inquiry might 'highlight gendered constructions of power, resistance and agency' (p.7). It might also inform our knowledge about the way women locate themselves in school leadership positions. The narrative approach would allow both myself and the participants to focus on our lives as we progress through our careers. This approach does not separate the private and the professional; it acknowledges that one impacts on the other. I acknowledge that these narratives will be socially and culturally

located, as we are continually negotiating what we would like to achieve in our careers, and even what we are afraid of achieving. Hall (1997) makes the point:

If we are to understand the meanings that leaders make of their work in Education we need to understand the totality of their meaning frames. As people progress through their careers, they are trying out 'possible selves'; that is, their ideas of what they might become and what they are afraid of becoming.
(Hall 1997: 315)

I came to realise by listening to their stories and letting the narrative speak back that it may help me to suggest new ways of negotiating our professional lives. I have made it explicit that I do not claim to be writing from a neutral objective position. The research questions are rooted in my own story: a story which has been structured as a result of my own interactions and intuitions.

I have been influenced by feminist literature and inspired by the work of Arnot (2002), Barr (1999), Blackmore (1999), Bradley (1996), Griffiths (1998), Hall (1996) and Munro (1998) to produce a feminist agenda. My study also embraces a post-structuralist approach when considering and analysing the concepts of leadership power, gender and identity. A post-structuralist approach provides a valuable framework for analysing and understanding the interaction between discourse and subjectivity at given times and places (Griffiths, 1995). This theoretical position was adopted because it recognises the value of telling, listening to, and understanding others' stories. The concept of difference is also useful. In this case it provides a tool to enable me to understand the differences in leadership experience. For example, those which exist between women and women and those that exist between men and women, in order to view them as provisional, contradictory and complex.

1.8 Positionality

The concept of subjectivity is also valuable to the research process as it encourages me to think about other women's realities as constructions. Weedon (1987) expresses this succinctly when she writes:

Subjectivity is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of her self, and her way of understanding her relation to the world.... Post-structuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak.

(Weedon 1987: 32)

My research is viewed from a female perspective; it cannot claim to be objective because it grew out of my attempts to make sense of my own career path, and to reflect upon the way gender permeates leadership experience. My story and those of the group interviewed will be different because of this positionality; however, there might be aspects that resonate with each of our hopes and concerns. A new understanding may result as I enter their space. I do not take up a detached position, and therefore cannot claim to do so. At the same time I make a claim to rigour through the theoretical interrogation of my data.

I was interested in how women negotiated their identities. I use Weeks' (1990) definition of identity:

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with other people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives a sense of personal location, the stable core of your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others.

(Weeks 1990: 88)

My intention was to make links between personal identity and professional identity. Personal identity, or the way we construct the self, is how we perceive ourselves and how we think others perceive us. Whereas, the professional identity I refer to here is the way we locate ourselves in our professional lives and how others locate us in these situations. It may account for the way women give meaning to their gendered positions in the workplace.

Consideration is given to the ways in which gender and identity are problematic in women's attempts to gain access to leadership positions in school. Many of the researchers who have embraced post-structuralist ideas have shown that this

can assist both theory and practice (Blackmore, 1999; Hall, 1996). This approach provides a different way of coming to an understanding of how our lives are structured by identity and gender. Furthermore, it opens up possibilities which allow taken-for-granted concepts and ideas surrounding gender and identity to be challenged: for example the supremacy of male over female. Implied in this approach is the notion that identity is constantly changing. Rather than having their identities written for them, as suggested by Luke and Gore (1992), and having to conform to other people's discourses, it raises the question whether it is possible for women to shape their own identities, or at least renegotiate them. If this is possible, then women may be able to negotiate their leadership approaches on their own terms. The problem remains that they will need to be given the same credence and recognition as men, and this may prove to be more difficult. Nevertheless, it offers an opportunity to explore the way identity can shape leadership aspirations, and even limit them. The problem appears to be that leadership is not only gendered, but so are the processes women have to go through to obtain such positions. This led me firstly to an examination of the routes women take to gain access to leadership positions, and secondly to an examination of the motivation that drives them to do so. Theory offers a guide to understanding the impact of gender. Having briefly outlined the concepts of gender, identity and leadership, I now want to turn to acknowledge the barriers that are still relevant to this study.

1.9 Barriers

I wanted to examine some of the cultural barriers that might affect women's career prospects. The concept of patriarchy is still a focus for feminist writers, and it continues to receive attention in the literature surrounding women in administration (Blackmore, 1999; Brooks and Mackinnon, 2001). Interestingly enough the focus has recently shifted from questions of why patriarchal practices cause women's subordination, to one which asks how it causes the situation to be perpetuated in our society (Arnot, 1993). Patriarchal practices

are embedded in the culture of our institutions and organisations. The consequence for women means that they are treated differently (Luke and Gore 1992; Reay and Ball 2000). For example, women being given less prestigious roles and responsibilities within the school, or being denied the opportunity to undertake a role that would develop leadership qualities, even if they have the skills to do the job (Davies, 1992). Do we need to look at the ways by which schools continue to allow men to be privileged to the disadvantage of women? In both theory and practice there is still a tendency to focus on male behaviour and assume it is appropriate for understanding all behaviour (Grace, 2000). Adopting a feminist framework allows me to look at the way women operate in the workplace and their emotional attitudes and feelings towards their work, allowing theory to be applied to the everyday practical experiences. Randell (1990) has shown that sexist language and sexual harassment has not been entirely obliterated. Speaking at a conference on the theme of Women in Educational Management (December 1990), she described how sexist language and sexual harassment in Australian Schools have prevented women seeking senior positions. My own experience leads me to endorse this view: schools in the UK continue to reflect male culture, and this could explain the preference for male candidates to fill headship posts. Schools, in my experience, are largely structured by men on the basis of their own cultural values. Women find themselves excluded from conversations and patronised in meetings; men often use sporting analogies that women do not understand, and tell jokes that can be offensive.

By challenging the view of educational management and leadership as a mainly masculine domain, I hope to extend our understanding of those processes that might give women fairer access to headship. I share Hall's (1996) view that the behaviour of the women in this study can only be understood if their socialisation, their educational experience, family, and personal commitments are included in the research.

1.10 Chapter Outlines

I now conclude with a brief summary outlining my subsequent chapters. In chapter two, I review relevant current literature on educational leadership and specifically set out to examine women's place within it. In chapter three I outline the methodology used in my research and offer a justification for the approaches and methods I adopted. Chapter four and five follow with an analysis of the data, beginning with profiles of the women in this study. Chapter four deals with the issues and analysis surrounding, firstly, the women's attempt to become leaders, and, secondly, their experiences once they have become leaders. It looks at the choices and constraints facing these women because of their gender. Chapter five concentrates on two younger women in one school in order to gain some insight into the interactions that produce and reproduce gender relationships. In addition I include an examination of the school's culture and ethos by interviewing the headteacher and chair of governors. In the concluding chapter I return to my research questions and show that gender has played a significant part in these women's attempts to gain headship.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This chapter considers some of the relevant literature surrounding women in leadership and focuses particularly on studies that identify leadership as a gendered concept. It also looks at studies that combine educational leadership with feminism. Further, it outlines the factors that impact on women's career decisions in an attempt to show that the concept of gender is significant for women aspiring to leadership positions. In the latter part of the chapter I consider a feminist post-structuralist approach, to provide a theoretical perspective in order to illuminate the way gender is constructed, and support a conceptual framework for the analysis and interpretation of my data around power, gender and identity.

This study grew out of my recognition that the educational leaders in our schools are predominately white and male (Coleman, 2003; Riley, 1994). At all levels of our education service women are under-represented in leadership positions. This chapter sets out to review some of the current literature on education leadership and women's place within it. The purpose is to enable me to understand the key ideas surrounding my research topic in order to construct a conceptual framework. I believe this will generate ideas and identify problems when examining my data. Additionally, in order to understand how women are located in leadership I also examine feminist texts that relate to the concepts of gender, power and identity.

2.1 Management and leadership – the same or different?

My initial search through the literature began by considering the concepts of leadership and management (Busher, 1997; Davies and Ellison, 1997; Day et al, 2000; Fullan, 1997, Grace 1995; Leithwood et al., 1996; Marland, 1993; MacBeath and Myers, 1999). In the annual review (2003) the National College

for School Leadership stated that there were currently 350 definitions of leadership (Hollingen et al., 2006). From the outset I made a decision to view the terms leadership and management as synonymous, even inter-changeable, but acknowledge that Grace, (1995) argues for the distinctive nature of the two concepts to be acknowledged. He believes that leadership is a more complex, comprehensive and extensive concept than that of management. Leadership is about understanding ethics, morality and spirituality. It involves commitment to transforming the undesirable features of school life - racism, classism and sexism in educational practice. However, Weiner (1995) suggests that it is acceptable to use the terms of leadership and management as interchangeable. Leadership is seen as the means to exercise power and influence over others; management is recognised as the means by which is accomplished. I am also attracted to the definition put forward by Corey and Merrill (1994) that leadership and management are the left and right hands, for in education, leadership and management appear to be inseparable. The Teacher Training Agency, in fact, links both leadership and management in the standards set down for aspiring headteachers. These standards include the requirement of headteachers to demonstrate their professional knowledge and judgement through their leadership skills, decision-making skills, their ability to communicate, and their effective and efficient deployment of staff and resources (TTA 1998a).

The literature covering educational leadership and management is extensive and I do not claim to have engaged with the full body of writing and research that exists on this subject. It has not been my intention to offer a detailed account of the processes of leadership. What I did find was that much of the literature assumed that leadership and management were gender neutral, even for writers who claimed to be writing from an emancipatory and democratic standpoint (Bolam et al., 1993; Bush, 1998; Busher, 1997; Grace, 1995; Harris et al., 2003). In these texts leadership and management is assumed to be a generic subject, which does not differentiate between men and women in the

exploration of leadership and management skills. Rather they focus on the requirements for leadership post the 1988 Education Reform Act and what they see as the skills needed for the 21st century, with an emphasis on school improvement. Harris et al. (2003) claim to offer an alternative way of leading that challenges orthodox leadership theories. Along with Fullan (2001), they question the idea of charismatic leaders in favour of those who will establish and nurture collaborative cultures, by encouraging positive relationships within school. Effective leaders are seen as individuals who build a capacity for improvement through an ability to share power. This view of leadership challenges the idea of a powerful single leader, with an over reliance upon commercial and business practice. Harris et al. (2003), in fact, argue for a style of leadership which places importance on teaching and learning and staff development in order to bring about a sustained school improvement. They believe that 'instructional leadership' may offer a means of achieving this goal:

The values and beliefs that infuse successful leadership focus on learning and empowerment. This implies a broader deeper view of learning. It is broader because within the instructional perspective learning refers not just to the progress of students but also the learning of teachers and leaders.

(Harris et al. 2003: 59)

This construct of leadership stresses the importance of what teachers do in their classrooms and focuses on the quality of teaching and learning. It therefore recognises the support and encouragement needed in order to achieve the learning goals set for students. It is a style of leadership that is not afraid to relinquish authority so that it is dispersed throughout the school. It advocates a move away from hierarchical leadership to a desire to share leadership with all members of the organisation. However, throughout the book leadership is still viewed as a generic subject and there is no mention of gender. It was, therefore, necessary for me to widen my search and look for texts that acknowledged and explored leadership as a gendered concept, and it is to this that I now turn.

2.2 Leadership: a gendered concept

Soobrayan (cited in Drake and Owen 1998) reflects that leadership is a gendered concept, and her assumptions had relevance for my study. She has argued that the structure, ethos and policies within organisations will need to change in order for women to achieve leadership positions in significant numbers. She maintains that women are excluded from these positions simply because they are women. Addressing the British Council Brighton Seminar in 1995 on Gender and Management Issues in Education, she was surprised to find that her assertion that gender was an issue was still a minority view. A majority of delegates still held to the belief that leadership was a matter of personality and could not be assessed in terms of gender. If this is the case one must ask why there are so few women leaders. Could it be that it is not only leadership and organisation that are gendered, but also the path to leadership? In order to investigate these issues I began to concentrate on studies that could provide useful insights into this problem.

Over the last decade or so more women writers have begun to focus on issues of gender equity in school leadership and management. They have questioned the reasons behind the under-representation of women in leadership positions (Adler et al., 1993; Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, 2003; Drake and Owen, 1998; Gold, 1993; Gunter, 2001; Hall, 1996; Ouston, 1993; Ozga, 1993; Reay and Ball, 2000; Riley, 1998). This is in contrast to Adler et al., who as late as the 1990's were still struggling to find texts that concentrated on women and leadership. There are now a number of research studies that focus on the subject of women in leadership. Unfortunately, the current situation for women has changed little: too few of them either aspire to attain or succeed in attaining leadership positions, and controversy often surrounds the leadership style of those that do. A common experience is that women have to struggle to initiate their own ways of leading. In Hall's (1996) study she maintains this has been achieved by the women she interviewed. It was, however, interesting to find that these successful women gloss over, or refuse to recognise, the relevance of

gender in their careers. Jenkin (1999) has criticised Hall for not exploring these women's denial of gender as an issue in leadership. Soothbrayan (1998) has suggested that women are reluctant to admit to the gendered nature of the job, as to do so may be seen as a sign of weakness. They may feel more comfortable believing they have reached their position because they were competent people. It may be also be that gender is such an integral part of our life that we take it for granted, and pay little or no attention to it.

Interestingly, this contrasts with Helgesen's (1995) research on women who run large American corporations. The four women she interviewed suggested that their vision of leadership had definitely been shaped by the fact that they were women. Likewise, Marshall (1984) questions whether women could really believe that being a woman was not an important factor in their career development, particularly as so few of them occupy senior positions in the publishing and retail industries. Nevertheless, she found over half of the women she interviewed had either little awareness of gender, or thought it was of little relevance to their career experiences. She argues that women deny this in an attempt to lessen the potential disadvantages of being a woman in order to conform to organisational socialisation. A smaller group of women actually acknowledged discrimination because of their gender, while the third group had developed a clear sense of themselves as women and accepted they were treated differently. It is interesting to note that Blackmore reminds us that:

Women are positioned as either without gender, or having the wrong gender.
Gender is still a problem for and of women.

(Blackmore 1999: 83)

The point being that in Hall's study, and also in Helgesen's, (1995) Marshall's, (1984) and Blackmore's (1999) work, just because gender may not be mentioned or discussed, the subject of a headteacher or manager is nonetheless always a gendered subject. As Blackmore (1999) underlines, society is gendered and education is not isolated from society. We carry our gendered biographies into the work place whether we know it or not.

2.3 Think leader, think male

Management and leadership continue to be conceptualised as masculine; a number of reasons have been put forward for this. Al Khalifa (1992) maintained this was because men were in the majority of senior positions and were able to set the standards of what is expected from a manager in masculine terms. These include aggressive competitive behaviours, with an emphasis on control rather than negotiation. If women continue to be under-represented then one might argue that these expectations will be perpetuated, and women are likely to remain disadvantaged. In addition it is apparent that at each stage in the attempts to secure headship positions, women face a preference for men on the part of appointing committees (Davies, 1990; Leithwood et al., 1991; Riley, 1994). Women are less likely to receive sponsorship from LEA advisers or be given the opportunity to undertake management responsibilities that would provide useful experience and preparation for headship (Riley, 1994). Davies (1990) goes further by claiming management is conceptualized in a way that excludes women, because men are given more opportunities to take ownership of decision-making processes and are given higher status roles in the school, for example curriculum and financial responsibilities, while women are confined to the pastoral and personnel issues.

It appears that men are encouraged to seek promotion at earlier stages in their careers. They also have the advantage of male heads being prepared to groom younger colleagues for headship by mentoring and coaching them into the role (Riley, 1994). At the same time women lack the same opportunities because there are fewer female heads to act as the role models (Coleman, 2003; Reay and Ball, 2002; Riley, 1998; Schmuck, 1986; Shakeshaft, 1987). It would seem that at each step towards promotion women come up against organisational processes which indicate a preference for males (Leithwood et al., 1991). This is not, however, confined to the preparation for administration, but also to the selection process, when there seem to be different expectations about female

and male candidates. It is here that the typical stereotypes come into play. Ousten (1993) reminds us that governing bodies are still predominantly male and middle-aged. Coleman (2002) found in the UK over 62% of the women in her sample had experienced sexist attitudes in the interview process. Coleman notes:

Direct discrimination on the grounds of race or sex occurs when someone is treated less favourably than others – not being employed on grounds of their gender or ethnicity. Potential examples of this abound in the reports of female headteachers, where the need for a woman to be better than a man in order to succeed, was quite overt in some interviews.

(Coleman 2002: 41)

Women are also aware that gender stereotypes, even if not admitted openly, influence selection panels' views of women candidates. As Evetts (1994) has indicated, selection panels that are predominantly male have difficulty overcoming the stereotypes of women as linked to home and family. Furthermore, stereotypes often depict women as less qualified and less able than men to manage and lead schools. Despite the fact we know that stereotypes are not accurate when it comes to women applicants, gender stereotypes still continue to play a major part in the selection of headteachers, to the detriment of women (Coleman, 2002). One might argue that men are assumed to be capable and hence appointed; whereas women have to prove their capability where the assumption is of maleness for leadership. This is tricky to do if they are not also being appointed.

2.4 The influence of feminisms on leadership

For the purpose of this research it was useful to consider texts that combined educational leadership and management with feminism. Studies that fit this brief are still relatively rare. However, two texts seem to suit my criteria. They are Hall's (1996) study of six female headteachers and Coleman's (2002) study of women as headteachers. Hall's study is based on observations and interviews to show what leading and managing a school looks like from a woman's perspective. She describes how six women became heads and the way they have

responded to the demands of headship. Coleman's study is also based on in-depth interviews with a number of women heads but additionally draws on data from a large-scale survey of both male and female headteachers. She identified a series of questions that might be asked by women who aspire to headship positions. She traces the career trajectories of both men and women, outlines the difficulties of balancing work and family, what women need to do to develop their careers, and finally what it takes to be a woman headteacher. Both studies recognise the importance of gender and examine the links between women's private and public lives. They look at the problem from the perspective of women who have indeed succeeded in obtaining leadership positions. I believe both studies provide support for, and a contrast to, the women in my study.

The main purpose of both studies was to focus on the ways gender impacts upon school leadership, and on the ability of women to lead and manage schools. They examine the styles of leadership adopted by successful female headteachers. These two authors make the claim that although their focus is on women, their work is both relevant and useful for both men and women. Hall and Coleman recognise the under representation of women in headship positions. Hall successfully challenges the idea that leadership of schools is implicitly for men. Nevertheless, she admits that as she began her research she found it difficult to avoid using men's behaviour as the measure against which to describe women in similar positions. She maintains that as her work progressed she came to recognise that these women were able to manage and lead the school on their own terms; they confidently adopted their own styles of leadership. On reading the accounts, the six women appear to have encouraged a culture in their schools whereby hierarchy, conflict and competition are minimised, while at the same time, collaboration and harmony were deliberately sought and encouraged. This adds support to the view put forward by Ozga (1993) that women prefer a people-centred and collaborative approach to leadership and management. Furthermore, Coleman (1991) suggests women

value leadership approaches that encourage 'wider forms of knowing and doing' (p.65).

The women in Hall's study demonstrated this by listening to the concerns of the staff and encouraging them to become involved both in the tasks performed and the process involved in determining the tasks. In addition, these headteachers provided personal support and adequate time for planning and completion of these tasks. They placed great emphasis on involving all of the staff in the crucial aim of enhancing the learning environment. The evidence she produces shows that this was not just a case of rhetoric, but a reality. Hall explains:

...they attempted to 'walk their talk' so that what they said about leadership and management and using power was reflected in their behaviour.

(Hall 1996: 141)

The challenge for women who have become headteachers is to redefine leadership in their terms, and give value to their own skills. Hall maintains that the women she studied were able to achieve this and were able to articulate their own conceptions of leadership. They did so in a way that was different from a dominant masculine model.

My study differs from Hall's and Coleman's research, in that their focus is on women who have already broken through the glass ceiling. The women I researched are still on route to headship. I wondered if the paths taken by Hall and Coleman's successful headteachers were relevant to those women aspiring to such positions. Would the opportunities, challenges and constraints be similar for all women? What could these studies provide that would help women to overcome the difficulties, or alternatively to recognise and seize the opportunities before them? Hall traces the way in which gender interrelates with women's public and private lives. Indeed, consideration in both studies is given to the choices and dilemmas women face when deciding they want to seek out headship positions. These studies have provided examples of the ways these women had overcome the difficulties they encountered as a result of their

gender. Although, surprisingly, the women in Hall's study seem to deny the issue of gender. The heads tended to say to Hall, "I wasn't aware of being a woman in that situation, but you may have perceived it differently" (p.179). In fact, one woman (Diana) believed that differences were more to do with personalities than gender. Whereas in Coleman's study, incidentally with a larger sample, more women recognised the impact of gender on their way to headship, but could use it to their advantage once they had succeeded to headship positions. Coleman writes:

Although awareness of gender is generally linked with inequality and seen as problematic for women, many of the women in the survey saw gender advantages in their role as leaders.....one of the positive aspects of being a woman headteacher is being 'noticed' – their rarity value might open up unexpected opportunities. One head said, because we are in a minority, I feel officers in the county make a conscious effort to involve us in county initiatives.

(Coleman 2002: 138)

In both Hall's and Coleman's study it would appear that once women had succeeded to headship positions they were able to cast off male stereotypes of leadership and develop their own strengths and abilities.

A further reason for reviewing both Coleman's and Hall's study in more detail was that, although their themes are similar, their research methods are very different. Coleman's gender sample includes men and women. Coleman uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. Her research is unusual in that she includes a large scale quantitative survey involving 670 women and 670 men headteachers. Hall's study, on the other hand, is a small scale qualitative piece of research based on a detailed study of six women headteachers over a two year period. Both researchers claim that their research findings are relevant to both men and women aspiring to become headteachers.

Hall recognises that her study focuses only on women, and suggests that perhaps the same sort of questions relating to gender need to be asked of men if we are to fully understand the nature of leadership. Her point is that in future leadership would not be seen as the exclusive property of men and some women, but would be relevant to all future headteachers regardless of gender. This seems to me to be a rather optimistic premise as ten years on the proportion of women in headship positions has changed little since Hall's research, as DfES (2004) statistics show. In the late 1990s 29% were in headship positions as opposed to 32.5% in 2006.

Coleman actively sought the views of both men and women in her study. She asked her female respondents to reflect on their experiences of career paths, combining family and career, and the stereotypes they had faced within their organisations and from outside. She then went on to examine the advantages and difficulties the women faced as headteachers. It was interesting to note that the most frequent reason given by these women for their success was 'hard work' followed by support from others. She also found that even successful women had experienced isolation, sexism and resentment from colleagues, and warns aspiring women heads to be prepared to face similar experiences.

I was particularly interested in the way these two researchers identified the links between women's personal and professional lives, and the way their identities were formed and crossed these boundaries. I was surprised that Coleman did not examine the early childhood and educational experiences of the women in her study. White et al., (1992) have pointed out in a study of 'high flyers' in commercial and industrial settings that parental influences, especially fathers, have influenced women leaders and likewise that their earlier educational experiences had encouraged independence, self-sufficiency and a desire to succeed. Coleman pays little attention to the way in which such experiences have impacted on their professional identities as leaders, particularly on their partners and family. Instead, she concentrates on the way social factors have

influenced their career trajectories. For example she found geographical location was significant. Women who applied for posts in rural or heavy industrial areas faced the view that their place was in the home, and men were chosen for headship posts in preference to women. The justification for omitting the impact of early socialisation may be in the purpose of her study. One of her aims was to consider the ways headteachers were able to strike a balance between work and home once in post.

Hall does consider the choices and dilemmas facing aspiring women headteachers. She suggests that her work, although confined to the education sector, supports work done on women outside education. For example, Marshall (1984) described career developments and lifestyles of women in industry that resemble those of the women in Hall's study. This suggests gender is a significant issue for all women, regardless of the career they had chosen. Hall poses the question as to whether successful women differ from other women as a result of their determination to become leaders. Do these women possess a strong belief in their own ability and have the self-confidence to become leaders? I believe Hall provides sufficient evidence that on the surface these women do appear to have successfully overcome the obstacles that many of us face in our career trajectories. They appear to have successfully managed the pressures of home and family life and minimised the effects of both on their professional lives. One could say that they had overcome some of the obstacles resulting from gender, and achieved their ambition to become leaders. Hall offers a possible reason why this is the case amongst her six women. She suggests it may lie in the influence of role models in these women's formative years.

2.5 Socialisation and the influence of family

All of the women in Hall's research appear to have been influenced firstly, by their fathers, and, secondly, by their brothers. They also came from families with a strong work ethic. All of the women displayed a strong desire to please

their fathers and had a significant relationship with them from an early age. In fact, even as successful heads they continued to look to their fathers for support and approval. These women's identities had been influenced by their fathers and this had contributed to their independence and determination to succeed. Hall (1997) commented that is because they:

.....may be exposed to a more diverse set of role options as a result of their different conceptualisation of men and women's roles in society and are able to develop an appreciation of their own feminine strengths and abilities
(Hall 1997: 318)

I believe that the relationships established with their fathers are a significant factor in the success of these women, and I feel that Hall does not develop this theme to any great extent. The women in her study do appear to have a self-confidence that is lacking in many of the women I have encountered in my professional life in schools. These women also have a clear idea of how they use power, and it would seem that this stemmed from experiences in their childhood. This gave them confidence to follow and define their own paths in their own time. Hall concludes:

...the women heads demonstrated the possibility of an inner path to headship based on self efficiency and self actualization; a path is chosen rather than a response to a demand.

(Hall 1996: 62)

The danger here is that mothers are again pathologised because it is the father's influence that seems to count. It may be that other women have had their career trajectories shaped by a strong and determined mother. This was true in the case of one of the women I interviewed.

At this point I want to turn to other ways in which girls are socialised and to consider the different behaviours, linked to gender, that might create what Adkinson (1981) explains as women's under-representation in leadership roles in terms of socialisation and sex role stereotypes. Girls, she argues, are less likely to engage in team games which help them to learn valuable social skills

and attitudes that are crucial to leadership and management situations. But Marshall (1984) questions the relevance of sex role stereotypes in both early and later socialisation. She asks how useful they are to our understanding of why women become leaders. She challenges the simplistic accounts of women breaking the moulds of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in order to enter the 'male' world of management. She asks what is meant by 'masculine' and 'feminine' and suggests that in fact it is the way women interpret the social constraints on forming their self identities which is of more relevance. She believes that the way men and women see and use power differently is of greater significance in shaping their lives and the lives of others.

White et al.'s (1992) study of women 'high flyers', in contrast, shows childhood and education experiences did have an impact on the successful women they interviewed. They conclude that these women were exposed to a diverse set of role options. As girls they absorbed some of the strength and abilities provided by their mothers as role models, and have the ability to develop their 'femininity'. Their fathers also had a special influence on these women: unlike many men, they were able to take both parents as role models. They had a choice about which aspect of each parent's behaviour they could accept or reject as part of their own identity.

Girls also have an ingrained gendered desire to win approval from others in childhood and this may remain dominant throughout their lives. Walkerdine (1990) has offered an explanation why most girls are conditioned into pleasing and passivity. She believes it lies in the fact that teachers often attribute girls' achievements in, for example, maths, to hard work rather than ability. Girls are conditioned by the negative comments about their academic performance to be passive and unquestioning. Boys are rewarded even when badly behaved in the classroom by positive comments about their natural ability. Walkerdine argues this fiction is perpetuated in order to preserve male power and interest because powerful women are seen as a threat to them.

Hall (1996) traces the educational experiences of the women in her study noting the opportunities and constraints they faced in school. They appear to have overcome the obstacles based on the idea that girls should be passive and have turned such behaviour positively into an ability intuitively to assess expectations and situations. It has not placed them in a situation of passivity or subordination. Education had provided the structure of opportunities to support these women's aspirations. Five of them had attended single-sex schools where high expectations were the norm in every aspect of their school work. These women, as girls, were also given leadership responsibilities as prefects or form captains. For successful women, then, family and educational experiences seem to be a significant factor.

2.6 Factors that impact on career decisions

Even though Coleman (2002) ignored early family life factors, and instead placed her emphasis on the way successful women's careers influenced their current family life, she does show clearly that women find their professional and personal identities interlinked. Throughout her study Coleman refers to the amount of time and hard work women put into their work. One respondent is quoted as saying she had worked 70 hours a week for fifteen years. Needless to say this affects private lives and it is not surprising that many women in Coleman's survey were either not married, or divorced, or separated from partners. She concludes that the demands at work place a greater strain on marriage for women than it does for men. She also found that only 51.7% women headteachers had children compared with 94% male headteachers. This supports Vinnicombe and Colewell's (1995) findings that women managers, in Europe, are more likely to stay single or to be childless than men. This study also relates the stress women face by combining work with child-rearing. It was also evident that some organisations compound the problem by operating double standards for married men as opposed to married women. A married male manager is regarded as an asset, with a stable network and support from

home; it is assumed that he will give all his attention to work. A female manager is often considered to be a liability, likely to neglect her career and put her family first at the expense of her job. It is interesting to note that in Aisenberg and Harrington's (1988) study of academic women, they argue that women have to play out gendered scripts, and that the dominant ones are: 'work' and 'life'; that women have to choose work or life; to have both is possible but demanding. By contrast, men do not have to choose between work and life; they have a partner to look after home and family.

Coleman's findings on conflicts which exist for women between work and family responsibilities confirmed those of Adler et al., (1993). They described the strong feelings of guilt women felt juggling child care and job responsibilities. Coleman's women saw it as their sole responsibility to sort out child care arrangements. They had to make choices and compromises. For example delaying promotion, or feeling guilty about putting families first. Some women delayed having children, or decided to remain childless. Coleman concludes,

Where women have challenged the norm in terms of the dominance of male leadership, they are likely to face particular difficulties in reconciling home and work and are making choices which involve the most basic human instinct of reproduction.

(Coleman 2002: 332)

Hall, too, notes that women who place a higher priority on career rather than parenthood still face disapproval from politicians and media, and society in general. Aspiring to headship will have serious implications for women in terms of family life. This becomes easier for women who do not have children, or who decide to seek promotion as their children get older and more independent. Younger women felt a need to work harder, to continually be proving themselves, to ensure they were always on top of the job. In addition, some women felt that they had to compartmentalise family from work, never being confident to talk about these issues. These women had to keep their private and professional lives separate. However, Hall does acknowledge that

women are constrained by role expectations that are derived from a masculine definition of gender and leadership, and this conflicts with what women in her study wanted to be. She states:

This was no more evident than in handling visibility, a challenge for all leaders...visibility brings vulnerability. For women, school leadership is not just about a head on display but also about being a woman on show. There is always the strain to present well, which meant being acceptable as a head and as a woman. Women managers are doubly on display and doubly vulnerable, since their authority is not automatically established through their position. It has to be reinforced through a 'sensitive manipulation of dress, speech and behaviour so that they appear in charge, but not controlling, strong but not threatening.

(Hall 1996: 100)

It is to this issue of how gender is performed that I now turn.

2.7 Dress to impress

I want here to focus on the issue of appearance, for this is one area where women can exert some control over how they will be responded to. It is something girls learn to do in childhood. According to Gray (1993), dress is important to a women's self-image, it can indicate authority, and it can be used to desexualise women, but allow them to remain feminine. It can be used to inspire confidence in oneself and help to secure the confidence from others towards the woman leader. Gray (1993) also makes the point that most men dress in a similar way to each other. In Hall's study the women claimed to dress to suit their individuality. They did not wish to play down their femininity but recognised that the way they dressed sent out gendered signals. There was a recognition among these women that the way they looked was often seen as more important than what they did. Two of the women described their need to dress appropriately, that is, dressing for a particular audience or a certain situation. This is something males rarely have to consider in the work situation. For example men do not have to 'power dress' in order to send out signals about their authority.

Heather and Barbara in Hall's study described how they used their dress to convey their values and beliefs at work, and chose a style to fit a particular situation. They believed it sent out a message of being in control if they dressed smartly. Heather remarked that she always dressed in a smart suit when attending the local heads' meeting in order to compete with the men. Barbara was concerned to use dress asexually, although most of her staff were female. Both women show clearly the importance they continue to have to place on their appearance. Marshall (1984) also recognises this when she comments that initially she had not considered dress important when she began her own study on women managers, but had to rethink this position when she came to realise that it was a factor influencing women's experiences of employment. She concludes:

If she does not actively take trouble over how she looks, the manager contravenes basic expectations of femininity, and again raises 'others' anxiety about who she is.

(Marshall 1984: 156)

Women have to compose an image of authority and it is an issue of gender, often having to match authority and femininity. It is problematic for women, and they have to show by their appearance that they are in charge. I suggest that it reflects the patriarchal values and structures in our society. Hall claims that women in her study have made up their own rules in leading their school; however, as far as dress is concerned they have to play the game by using the rules of others if they are to be taken seriously as leaders.

Throughout our own lives as girls we are socialised to please others. Behaviour linked to gender is learned in school and in the family, and although we can make choices, certain conventions are still too powerful to break away from: dress and appearance for these women leaders falls into this category. Sheppard (1992), in her study of women managers, describes one woman who bought an expensive suit to wear when she did not want anyone to be reminded she was a woman. She concludes that the area of appearance seems to be the one where

women feel they can most easily exert some control over how they will be responded to.

Overall, Hall (1996) and Coleman's (2002) studies are important because they help challenge the idea of management and leadership as a purely masculine concept. However, educational leadership is about power, and I do not feel that either study really analyses this concept in sufficient depth. Both studies have taken into account the agency exercised by these headteachers; they have examined their aspirations and the decisions and choices they made over time. These women have their own perceptions and a strong sense of what a leader should be, and how they should conduct themselves. Gunter (2001) also makes a pertinent comment when she says that we do not know enough about the women who do not apply or give up. What happens to put them off pursuing promotion? How women experience their lives, work and the organisation is central to their identity and the choices they decide to make. In order to better understand how women are located in leadership I found feminist theories particularly useful. I want therefore to explore conceptual frameworks based in power, identity, gender and patriarchy.

2.8 A feminist post-structuralist perspective

Blackmore (1999) believes that post-structuralist ideas can assist both theory and practice, in that they provide a different approach to our understanding of how our lives are structured by identity and gender. Furthermore, it opens up possibilities which allow taken-for-granted concepts and ideas surrounding gender, power and identity to be challenged. It makes clear that existing knowledge is no longer adequate. Many feminist writers have embraced post-structuralism because of this, and recognise knowledge as uncertain and revisable. Post-structuralism helps to generate a useful conceptual framework of power relations, identity and subjectivity. Feminist research places women and gender in a central position in the scheme of things, and is supported by a

desire to improve both women's position in the work place, and also their personal lives.

I have been influenced by feminist literature and inspired by the work of Arnot (2002), Barr (1999), Blackmore (1999), Bradley (1996), Griffiths (1998), Munro (1998) and Weedon (1987) to produce a feminist agenda and to embrace a post-structuralist approach in order to employ these concepts. It is a valuable framework because as Griffiths (1995) points out, according to the theories put forward by Foucault and Derrida, events and situations have to be understood 'in the interplay of discourse and subjectivity at particular times and places' (p.226). This I believe is particularly useful for a small-scale study. I offer a snap-shot and theorising rather than grand theory. It is a position that recognises the value of telling, listening and understanding the stories of others. My research is viewed from a female perspective; it cannot claim to be neutral and objective because it grew out of my attempts to make sense of my own career path, and to reflect upon the way gender permeates leadership experiences. My story and those of the group I interviewed will be different because of this subjectivity. I acknowledged in chapter one that subjectivity is an important concept. It is a recognition that people take up different positions at different times. The women in my study show that at times they have considerable power over others, in their classrooms and when exercising their prescribed roles. At other times they feel powerless and are in a subordinate position to their male headteachers. They also construct themselves in different roles, at times that of deputy head, at other times that of friend or mother. In addition there are the stereotypical constructions, such as teacher-carer that women have to endure. Subjectivity accounts for the way we give meaning to ourselves and others and the way our feelings and emotions form our self image. Weedon (1987) proposes that subjectivity is precarious and accounts for the contradiction in our experiences.

I found Munro's (1998) work useful as it is situated in feminist post-structuralist theories. Her research interests focus on the narrative analysis of women's life histories and the discourses of qualitative methodology. She was drawn towards post-structuralism because it allowed her to reject grand theories. She believes that reality is not 'out there' but constructed through discourse and language, adopting Foucault's (1980) version of post-structuralism. He argued that individuals are not only products of language. Institutions such as hospitals, prisons and, in my case, schools also produce relations of power and knowledge that serve to control and regulate the individual. Munro also rejects the myth of neutrality and objectivity in her research. She believes that the claims made about women are not based on some given truth but emerge and re-emerge in the context of time and culture. These claims are subjective because Munro's work is inevitably a mixture of her personal experience and theoretical position. However, she makes clear her own positionality, a pre-requisite of post-structuralism. These themes resonate with the requirements of my own research work.

Barr's (1999) research also supports the claim that post-structuralist insights can both support feminist theory and practice because it provides us with an understanding of the way our lives are structured by gender. We do not all do things the same way and our identities are not fixed; in fact we experience many contradictions and conflicts within our feminist identity. She writes that her own experiences told her:

.. In some families, including my own, fathers are caring and nurturing, mothers distant and powerful; daughters may bond with fathers, mothers with sons; and class as well as race made a difference.

(Barr 1999: 106)

At this point I want to consider the concept of gender. Connell's (2002) study on this topic shows it is an enormous theme and the literature surrounding gender is vast. In order to understand it he suggests we have to 'travel both intellectually and culturally' (p.vii).

2.9 Reproducing gender

It is easy to take gender for granted as it is part of our social lives; we recognise a person as a man or a woman. Gender is concerned with patterns of social relations within which we learn to perform. In Connell's (2002) terms gender must be understood as a structure of social relations, 'the way human society deals with human bodies' (p.10). These sets of relationships or gender regimes exist in all organisations. They are part of life in schools and are open to change because they mirror the gender order in society, and can reflect changes that occur there. However, Connell (2002) argues that because gendered relations are produced socially by power structures (and not by any biological differences) in order to constrain individuals, they frequently appear to be static. Schools, like other organisations, have regular sets of arrangements about gender which determine who is recruited to do certain roles and tasks.

The constant theme running through the literature on gender is that men still seem to be the beneficiaries of the gender orders that exist. For example, women may have made inroads into middle management, but senior positions are still in the hands of men. In one of the schools in my study all the major heads of subject departments were women, whereas 10 years ago they were in the hands of men. However, there are still no women heads. Russell (1995) has also suggested in her work with teachers in Canada that hard work and good qualifications has meant that women have advanced into middle management posts. She adds, 'but it is who you know and what information you have access to that is critical for people who are aspiring to more senior levels of organisational life' (p.132). This is not only true for schools, but in government, in the armed forces, the police force and in business and the commercial sector: the list is endless. It is interesting, too, that although successive governments have made claim to equal opportunities policies, Arnot (2002) has shown the contradictions that exist. She has questioned the approaches made by governments in the last two decades of the twentieth

century to patriarchal relations both in public and private circles and to women's position within these circles. She has argued that Conservative governments from Thatcher onwards have encouraged a moral crusade in support of the patriarchal family, while at the same time promoting the principles of the free market society, in which all individuals are encouraged to realise their full potential. She writes:

..contained within these contexts are the gendered roles of bread-winning husband and dependent wife...I have argued that conservative political thinkers have manipulated concepts of competitive individuals and equal opportunities for their purposes, thus hiding both their own ideological confusion, and also their continued support for patterns of male dominance.

(Arnot 1992: 188)

Arnot (1992) believes that patriarchal practices exist in our educational system, and manifest themselves through the assertion of male values in styles of pedagogy and modes of assessment. She reminds us that the list of subjects included in the National Curriculum is based on the traditional 'male' Grammar School curriculum. Notwithstanding what Arnot advances, it nevertheless needs to be noted that since 1990 course work has been given greater prominence in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) syllabuses. This I believe provided a better fit to girls' attitude to learning. It suited their conscientious and diligent approach to study, and is reflected in their examination performance. However, there have been concerns recently over coursework and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is proposing removing coursework (TES. 6. 10. 2006). The concerns centre around internet cheating and parents doing the work. QCA has decided that a more formal, less flexible approach is needed; coursework will be replaced in 9 subjects from 2009, either by more examinations or with set supervised assessment tasks, marked by the examination boards. It will be interesting to check what effect this will have on girls' performance over the next five years. It would be useful too, to track the careers of those women who have experienced success out-performing their male peers in examinations at all levels. It would be interesting to discover if these women have succeeded into

obtaining leadership positions in greater numbers than the present generation of women.

Furthermore, Arnot (1992) points to the cuts that the government made in state welfare provision in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This inevitably has had an impact on women, who once more are required to care for young children or aging relatives, thus reinforcing the idea that women should remain at home. I believe Arnot has successfully argued that the state in the latter part of the last century was actively engaged in shoring up patriarchal relations, albeit in a different form. She concludes that the concept of patriarchy and patriarchal practices still exist in our society. The focus may have shifted from questions of why patriarchal practices are a cause of women's subordination to ones that concentrate on the looking for reasons for their perpetuation in our society.

Patriarchal practices are embedded in our schools, where girls and women continue to be treated differently. For example women are given the less prestigious roles and responsibilities within the school, and are often denied the opportunities to undertake roles that develop leadership qualities even if they have the skills to do the job (Davies, 1992). Connell (2002) refers to a 'patriarchal dividend' by which he suggests the advantage that men as a group have in sustaining and maintaining an unequal status or gender order. This may have slightly diminished as gender equality has increased, but Connell (2002) maintains that men still continue to be the beneficiaries and therefore seek to sustain and defend patriarchy. It is an unquestioned assumption and men do not even pay attention to it. What Arnot (2002) refers to as the 'New Right' has implemented policies that continue to allow male privilege to the disadvantage of females. In both theory and practice the tendency is to focus on male behaviour and assume it is appropriate for understanding all behaviour. Women continue to struggle to gain equal value for their femaleness as opposed to equal access to the benefits of maleness. Walby's (1990) work has indicated that patriarchy continues to influence women's lives. The only change is a

transition of patriarchal practices from the home to the workplace. Walby's model focuses on institutional inequality in gender relations in that women are now allowed access to the public arena, but are subordinated to men by a new form of patriarchy. This replaces the situation where women were subordinated in the household by husbands or fathers. Connell (2002) is somewhat critical of this model as he considers it to be inflexible. He therefore proposes a different model to explain gender patterns revolving around four dimensions of gender. It is this model I now want to examine.

2.10 Four dimensions of gender

Connell (2002) places an emphasis on power as a dimension of gender. In the post-modernist turn patriarchy is seen by some as inadequate as a concept when considering gendered power. The argument is that patriarchy suggests that all power rests with men, while women are viewed as the passive participants of male power. Connell (2002) draws on the work of Foucault (1977) in order to question the notion of uni-directional power. Post-modernists believe that Foucault offers an alternative approach to power relations because he proposed that power is widely dispersed and operates diffusely through the way we write, speak and in our actions. He argues that:

This diffuse but tenacious power operates close up, not at a distance. It impacts directly on peoples' bodies as 'discipline' as well as on their identities and sense of place in the world.

(Connell 2002: 59)

The notion being put forward here is that alongside institutionalised power there is also a diffused power, and this has an appeal to women because it opens up a means of possible resistance, albeit still within some constraint. It means we can be what we want to be and that gendered power is like all forms of power, never totally dominant: some individuals can and do resist even extreme forms of dominance, Foucault writes:

We can never be ensnared by power; we can always modify its grip in indeterminate conditions and with a precise strategy.

(Foucault 1988: 23 cited in Paechter 2001: 44)

If we accept that power is exercised in many ways by individuals themselves through either self-discipline or self-determination, then we also need to understand how power operates in given circumstances (Blackmore, 1999); this in turn may open the way for change. Blasé and Anderson (1995) have suggested that we can exercise power through earned respect and trust. It could mean that women could use their sense of integrity and their desire to meet the needs of others as a means of exercising power. Blasé and Anderson (1995) describe this succinctly as using power 'through' and power 'with' subordinates and stakeholders. Power in this context is used to encourage an expectation that the ability to participate is a right rather than a privilege given at the discretion of supervisors. It means involving people in the decision-making process, allowing them to develop ideas, encouraging ownership and motivation in order to achieve the anticipated goals. This would be a move away from the idea of one individual's or group's dominance over another.

The second structure of gendered relations identified in Connell's model is that of 'production'. It refers to the division of labour: that is, where certain tasks are performed by men, others by women. In our modern society this is not exclusively so as the gendered division of labour has moved on from that of one gender confined to unpaid domestic work and the other to paid work. Both men and women are involved in the economic sphere but are still largely located differently and receive different benefits from it. This system still tends to favour men; men receive higher incomes and gain the more senior positions in organisations. Women, on the other hand, still tend to occupy the unskilled part-time posts, or at least the lower paid jobs. In schools, for example, they occupy the clerical and support posts which are offered both on fewer hours and less money: few men are found in these positions. In addition, women still do most of the domestic labour even when they are in full-time employment.

If we take the term 'production' in a school context as the production of knowledge, then it is largely men who are the policy makers behind the curriculum (Arnot 2002). If we consider those who have had a significant impact on what happens in schools today we see men like Chris Woodhead (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector), David Blunkett (Secretary of State for Educational Employment) and Mike Tomlinson (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector) as having influence in determining the curriculum, standards and assessments. This contrasts with a woman, Estelle Morris, resigning her position as Secretary of State for Education and Skills because of pressures being placed upon her.

We may have dispensed with the title 'Senior Mistress' in schools, but in reality women are still doing the pastoral jobs and performing the 'softer' roles while men still tend to occupy the more prestigious jobs concerned with pedagogy and curriculum. Moreover, more aggressive tendencies of the business world have crept into school management with the emphasis of value-added performance and encouragement of continuous competition through the numerous testing regimes. This may not square up to the idea of empowering others; they reflect rather the idea that policies are pushed through at all costs.

The third part of Connell's axis relates to emotional relations, an important dimension of gender. This is concerned with relationships, attachments and commitments and can be positive and negative. An example cited by Connell is that of prejudice against women. In a survey undertaken for the Institute of Management by Charlesworth (1997) women identified prejudice from colleagues as a major barrier to their career progression. In this study women found they were unable to gain access to influential committees within their organisations. The notion that women are not as able as men, the so-called deficit model, is no longer a serious consideration (Acker, 1994). Whether it will lead to a situation where stereotypes and prejudices are also discredited is more problematic. For as Schmuck (1996) concludes:

...socially constructed meanings of gender, stereotypically restrict women to subordinate roles and identifies them primarily in the domestic area, men on the other hand are located in the public area.

(Schmuck 1996: 350)

Theorising about organisations and researching into the structures of administration has been conducted from a predominantly male perspective.

Blackmore (1999), in her study of Australian headteachers, also found that women faced prejudice from male colleagues over their management approaches. Hall (1996) likewise gives an example of a male deputy challenging a female head because he did not think her way of running the school was appropriate. For her part, she had to continuously justify her actions. On one occasion she faced criticism from the deputy because he had had to deal with irate parents over a playground fight while she had been in a governor's meeting. The implication, on his part, was that he was doing more important work in the school. This, I believe, provides an example of the way emotional relationships serve to reinforce the stereotypes that exist around women in leadership positions (Schein, 1976): that women are not 'tough' enough to deal with serious disciplinary issues in schools.

Emotional relationships are particularly pertinent to women because this connects with feelings of inadequacy and one's self esteem within the workplace. It relates to a woman's sense of worth within the school and focuses on what we feel we are able to achieve, and what we strive to achieve. Griffiths (1995) argues that achievements and self esteem are by-products of gender. If one is excluded from conversations, or one's ideas are either 'high-jacked' or ignored then self esteem is reduced. For a woman this means having to adjust her actions and play down aspects of herself in order to be acceptable within the group: in the case of a school, the senior management group.

Randell (1990) has shown that sexist language and sexual harassment has not been entirely obliterated. Speaking at a conference on the theme of women in education management she described how sexist language and sexual harassment in Australian schools have prevented women from seeking senior positions. My own experience leads me to endorse this view. Schools in the UK continue to reflect male culture (Mac an Ghail, 1994) and this could explain the preference for male candidates to fill senior posts. Schools are largely structured by men on the basis of their own cultural values. Women find themselves excluded from conversations and patronised in meetings; men often use sporting analogies that women do not understand and jokes which are offensive. Cunnison writes:

Gender joking is almost entirely initiated by men. It is men defining women at work in sexual, domestic or maternal terms which detract from their image as professionals. As such it is a put down, a way of controlling and subordinating women...and one mechanism among others which militates against their promotion.

(Cunnison 1989: 166)

I now conclude with the fourth dimension of Connell's (2002) model, that concerned with symbolic relationships. This dimension centres on the making of meaning. Connell reminds the reader that:

Society is unavoidably a world of meanings. At the same time meanings bear traces of the social process by which they were made.

(Connell 2002: 65)

He maintains that when we talk about or think about 'a man' or 'a woman' we conjure up an overwhelming number of implications, understandings and perceptions we have collected through our cultural experiences. This, he argues, may be the reason why patriarchal gender arrangements may be so difficult to break. Connell (2002) draws on the model of the structure of symbolism provided by Lacan:

Lacan's (1977) analysis of the phallus as a master symbol gave rise to the interpretation of language as phallogentric, a system in which the place of authority, the privileged subjectivity is always that of the masculine.

(Connell 2002: 65)

This would suggest that patriarchal practices are difficult either to change or escape from because they permeate the language, and language is also shaped by relations of power (Spender, 1980). It is reflected in the usage because both men and women speak and think of masculinity as superior. Bradley (1996) asserts that the phallogentric nature of language means that women often lack a voice of their own and can only speak in masculine terms. Pringle's (1989) research into secretaries shows that it is difficult to change peoples' expectations about gender. This study revealed that discourses on femininity and masculinity in fact reinforced power relationships in the workplace. Women were seen as bitchy and bossy and this reinforced the view that men made better managers. Similarly Whetherell et al. (1987) found university student attitudes to gender ambivalent. For, although they saw marriage as an equal partnership they still believed that child-care responsibilities should still be the mother's ultimate responsibility.

Dress can also be identified as a form of gender symbolism, often representing conformity to both organisational and masculine norms. Women, for example, gain legitimacy because of their appearance rather than what they say or do. I have previously touched upon the importance of dress when reviewing Hall's study of six women headteachers. Blackmore (1999) also found the women in her study dressed for their job as leaders. What they actually wore and dressing 'properly', they believed, would lead to them being taken more seriously as teachers and their voices being heard.

Connell (2002) speculates whether it is possible to extinguish these gendered relations and if a gender-free society would be a way of bringing about radical change. He believes that post-structuralist theories show that change may be

possible because of the assertion that gender categories are far from stable. A good illustration is provided by the work of Butler (1990) who argues that the category of woman is unstable and uncertain. Butler (1990) sets out to show that identities are constructed in the context of time and therefore are open to change. It is this idea of identity I now wish to consider.

2.11 A question of identity

Post-modernists stress identities are always in a state of flux because they are shaped by numerous social elements: class, race, age, ethnicity and gender. Stuart Hall (1996) maintains that identity is a construction, that it is always in process, never completed. The stress here is on culture rather than structure and consequently allows individuals to become active agents in their own lives. Butler (1990) argues that we cannot take identity as a given: rather we constantly perform our identity and moreover attempt to interpret the performance of others. Women may, for example, indulge in flirtatious performances with male colleagues. Women in powerful positions may feel the need to do this in order to reassure themselves of their femininity. Each time we 'perform' the repetition holds certain identities more firmly in place, but it also opens the idea that we can negotiate our notion of identity (Orner 1992). It allows for the possibility of switching among a range of different roles and positions. Furthermore, it means we can begin to question the assumption of the superiority of the male over the female. Bradley (1996) reminds us that a post-structuralist approach allows us to look at gender analysis in terms of subjectivity and bring the issue of identity into a central position. It allows for many versions of womanhood:

Gender may for feminists be a source of politicized identity which leads them to work for equality and women causes. For other women, awareness of gender may involve traditional ways of displaying femininity, through domestic or caring roles, motherhood or the assertion of sexuality. Given that the gender experience is so differently felt by women of different ethnic groups, ages, religions, nationalities or sexual orientation, it is evident that there are multiple versions of womanhood.

(Bradley 1996: 106)

The point being that we are exposed to a variety of elements, all of which form part of our individual identities. Again we cannot escape from power relations when dealing with the concept of identity. We need to understand, as women, our desire for power and our fear of it. It may mean that we have to make a determined effort to combat the effects of our socialisation. I found Walkerdine's (1998; 1990) work particularly useful in this respect. She believes that post-structuralism allowed her to question the 'truth about women' (p.135). She argues that if women being powerful is threatening it is not surprising women are reluctant to recognise power in themselves:

Women's success appears to present such a threat to masculinity and to the bourgeois and patriarchal power which it underpins, that it is very dangerous for women to admit their own power.

(Walkerdine 1990: 143)

If girls are conditioned to be passive it is no wonder they grow up to have negative connotations about power. Blackmore (1999) takes up Walkerdine's (1993) idea about femininity as 'performance' (p.267). She argues that cultural practices tend to deny women either seeking or enjoying power. Women, therefore, tend to have to act out a script in their leadership positions. Some women reflect their sense of identity in terms of their connections to others, by supporting and empathising with others, and sharing leadership. They often do not feel comfortable with having power over others. Power for some women has negative connotations, being associated with control and domination.

Identity is constantly shifting. Rather than women having their identities written for them and having to conform to the discourses of others, the literature has shown that it is possible for women to shape their own identities, or at least renegotiate them. If this is possible then women may be able to negotiate their leadership identities on their own terms. It opens the way to explore the way identity can shape leadership aspirations and limit them.

2.12 Reflections

Theorising about organisations and researching into structures of administration have been conducted from a predominately male perspective. I have tried to redress the balance here by looking at literature which has specifically related to women in leadership. In a recent article Groundwater-Smith (2006) reviewed a book on leadership edited by Collard and Reynolds (2005). This book foregrounded gender, a welcome move placing the concept at the centre of the leadership debate. As the publication of this book coincided with the completion of my dissertation it has not substantially influenced my thinking. However, I would make the partially qualified point that a publication with an impressive number of researchers committed to gender equity goes some way to ensuring that in future leadership will no longer be viewed as a gender neutral subject.

In order to come to a deeper understanding I have engaged with feminist post-structuralist theories in order to construct a conceptual framework in which to analyse my data. In the following chapter I focus on my methodology and justify the ways in which my own experiences have impacted upon the study and relationships I sought to establish with the women involved in my research.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I set out to discuss and justify my chosen methodology and methods. I wanted to find a methodology capable of providing me with a way of generating fieldwork data and evidence in order to find answers to my research questions. I begin with my search for a methodological 'home' and the problems this generated. This is followed by a discussion surrounding the decision to follow a feminist agenda. I was conscious that this chapter would represent an important part of my work. I recognise the need to be constantly reflecting upon my particular stance throughout this crucial aspect of the research process.

3.1 Which methodology?

I came to this research bringing my own assumptions, values and beliefs. I believed that by understanding myself and my way of seeing the world I might come to a deeper understanding of the experiences of the women in this study. The question arose, where would I find a methodology which would meet my initial assumptions and answer my research questions? For example, the leadership in schools in the area in which I work is all too frequently identified as male. So often male experiences are considered to be more important in school management teams, and consequently women's voices are ignored and neglected. I needed a methodology that would enable me to address my research questions; realising it would have to take into account a feminist stance. My reading had indicated that methodology is crucial and would shape everything I did from the outset and influence the knowledge I produced from my study. I began by scrutinising some texts and rejecting others. I was drawn to texts which examined concepts of gender, identity and power centred on women leaders (Adler et al., 1993; Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, 2002;

Shakeshaft, 1989). This investigation led me to delve into the unequal distribution of power in the field of educational management. At the same time I realised my own situation, background and experiences would influence the story I would tell. I wanted to find a methodology that would accommodate my positionality, one that would allow me to construct my perspectives about the world in which I work. I was acutely aware that my positionality has influenced not only my reading, and the interpretation of the literature, but also the methodology and methods used in this research. I would suggest that this positionality is only problematic if it is not reflexively interrogated.

3.2 Searching for a methodological 'home'

I was searching for a methodology informed by the same feminist substantive ideas that I was exploring in relation to women and leadership. I was attempting to make sense of my own experience, that of failing to secure a headship, despite having achieved the necessary skills, qualifications and expertise. I began with the idea that I could come to a deeper understanding of my situation if I were able to share and examine this experience with women I knew to be in a similar position. But I also wanted to speak for women and communicate their aspirations to a reader. Further, I intended to investigate the opportunities and the constraints they had encountered in their endeavour to become leaders.

Feminist writers have argued that in knowing others we come to know ourselves - for example, Marshall (1986). I was drawn towards feminist literature and feminist methodology because I thought the socialisation women had had as girls may have a bearing on this situation. From this starting point I then began to consider the organisations in which women work. I went on to question whether the gendered nature of schools pointed to reasons for the unequal distribution of female headteachers in this district. I needed to place the substantive and methodological emphasis on women's experiences for this had generated the original research questions. I am therefore located in this

research and was drawn towards a feminist stance because this provided a focus for the existence and persistence of male domination in schools.

So much of the literature on school leadership focuses upon men, as Hall (1996) asserts, is written by men, is about men and is for men. She explains:

Prescriptions for successful school leadership, such as those outlined in Jenkins (1991) marginalize gender by assigning it to a special category rather than recognising its pervasive quality,

(Hall 1996: 3)

But feminist literature and methodology places women centre-stage; it also challenges and rejects claims of neutrality and objectivity. As Ozga (2000) states:

There is no neutral, Olympian space from which an unbiased, objective account of policy research can be given. We are all partisan but only some of us acknowledge it.

(Ozga 2000: 36)

I was, then, drawn to a feminist methodology. At this point I now want to explore some of the issues and dilemmas in feminist methodology as I understand them.

3.3 Objectivity and subjectivity

Feminist writers believe that a researcher does not stand outside of the research but is part of it; consequently there is an acceptance of the researcher's subjectivity. This does inevitably affect both the research process and the outcome of the research. This is a valid point in my case because I used my own experience as a resource to identify the research questions in this study. I found Smith (1987) justifies my stance when she claims that truly feminine research originates from the idea that a woman's experience emerges from a woman's reality. Other feminist writers continue to question the value of objectivity and are critical of research studies that treat people as objects for data collection rather than subjects (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). By doing so

they are rejecting claims of neutrality and objectivity for both the researcher and the process. This is difficult for I am aware that the problematising of the concept of objectivity could provide critics with the excuse to devalue the research findings, or at least fail to take the research findings seriously.

Nevertheless, I would argue that the emphasis researchers place on the concept of objectivity will depend on their particular standpoint, it will be reflected in the purpose of the research and the researcher's value and beliefs. If one adopts and accepts feminist beliefs then there will be a tendency to challenge the role objectivity-as-neutrality plays in any research project. However, by doing so I am not arguing that we collapse into prejudice or bias. It will be necessary for me to strive for a reflexive, rigorously researched account, theoretically informed, which nonetheless recognises the effects of positionality.

Feminists are likely to be drawn to a set of ideas that provide a conceptual framework for the existence of male domination not only in school leadership but in all aspects of society. I was attracted to the fact that many feminist researchers are critical of research projects that treat the people being studied as objects rather than subjects. I was encouraged to find that Ozga, (2000) does not accept the premise that researchers can remain outside their subject or maintain a distance from it in order to achieve objectivity. She illustrates this point by suggesting feminist researchers will favour the interview and narrative approach as opposed to what she calls the 'technicist' and distant process such as administering a questionnaire. The interview will involve interaction and negotiation and includes the researcher's values. Furthermore, Clough (2002), also reminds us that 'we do not come in innocent to a task or situation of events; rather we wilfully situate those events....we constitute them as an expression of ourselves' (p.138). I understand this to mean that the research process is not only about 'ways of doing' but also involves 'ways of being'. It allows me to focus on the different, even diverse, experiences of women. This approach has been recognised by feminist writers (Marshall, 1986; Mies, 1984; Webb, 2000). It is by reflecting on women's experience that we are able to place

women at the centre and begin to move away from the idea that male experience is what we as women are to be measured against. It is also a rejection that views about male leadership can be assumed to be applicable to women.

Marshall (1986) accepts that her own research not only feeds back into her life experiences but has led her into a deeper commitment to feminism. The following extract certainly resonates with my own research journey. Until I began my research programme I had a somewhat different perspective on my work experiences and treatment. Like Marshall I had considered 'me' as a person rather than 'me' as a woman. I recognised my own thoughts and feelings when I read these words written by her:

The development of my intellectual understanding, has, then, been paralleled by the emergence of a new sense of myself as a woman in a public world structured largely by men...this is a fact I partially ignored, certainly played down previously... I submerged any awareness of being a woman, especially at work, and generally hoped to be treated as a person first.

(Marshall 1986: 5)

This coincided with a realisation on my part that being a woman may have hampered my own chances of gaining a leadership position. I began to see that my research was going to be a journey of discovery. My personal experience was a crucial part of the study. Mies (1984) sees personal experience not only as an asset but a necessity. She writes,

Feminist women must deliberately ...integrate their repressed unconscious female subjectivity, that is, their own experiences of oppression and discrimination into the research process.

(Mies 1984: 138)

3.4 Identity and subjectivity – a lived experience

My research required a methodology that would enable me to interrogate the interaction between women's private and public lives: to discover how identity

and subjectivity affects how we perform our roles as leaders in schools. It allowed me to tease out how our working lives are gendered. I have previously described how this project arose from my experience as a deputy head in a high school. The impact of this has meant the research process became a lived experience for me, enabling me to learn both through it and with it. It is useful to note that Reinharz (1992) maintains that feminist researchers frequently start with an issue that concerns them personally, as it provides them with material from which research questions can be generated. In my case it also presented the source for identifying the people in my sample. Furthermore it led me to trace my subjects' experiences from their family origin, through school and college and career experiences to discover the part these aspects of their lives played in the choices they had made. I wanted to know if these experiences had provided them with a basis for the type of leaders they hoped to become. In addition, was there a relationship between who they were and how they wanted to act as leaders?

Barr (1999) convinced me that post-structuralist insights can assist feminist research and practice by providing an understanding of how our lives are structured by gender, class, race and age. By its very nature post-structuralism challenges taken-for-granted ideas and encourages the researcher to ask different questions. For example what is the nature of power? How does power operate? Do women experience power in a different way? Does post-structuralist theorising allow us to distance ourselves from traditional beliefs about power? If it does, then we can consider the concept of power in a more critical way. In addition, it can open up a new dialogue concerning leadership approaches and allow the researcher to question the domination of emotion over reason. Feminists argue that you cannot separate reason from emotion in a simplistic way. One of the arguments for not promoting women into senior positions has been that female leadership has been perceived as emotional rather than rational (Ozga, 1993). I agree with Paechter (2001) when she argues:

By challenging the dominant discourses of reason over emotion, post structuralist thinkers have made space for the discussion of the physical, visceral and emotional factors both in power and knowledge relations and in our thinking about the world more generally.

(Paechter 2001: 44/45)

I would contend that leadership is a highly emotional activity. This is the reason why post-structuralism has an attraction since it can help to focus on a diversity of social experiences, and the link between theory and practical experience (Arnot, 2002; Bradley, 1997; Griffiths, 1998; and Weedon, 1997). It leads the researcher to question old certainties and move towards an acceptance that all views are equally valid. The relevance of post-structural theorising for my methodological approach is that it takes the researcher away from the grand metanarratives and allows her to pay attention to 'small' narratives of regional issues and everyday life. In my case it made it possible to explore the local narratives of a particular group of women who were aspiring to headship positions. It enabled me to ask how competing pressures of home and family had impacted on their career choices; to consider whether their personal identities have influenced the way the women have responded and developed their careers.

3.5 A mutual dialogue

I now turn to the issues and relationship between myself and the women in the study because I believe this to be a significant methodological issue. I was attracted to the idea that research was an interactive and relational process. This was outlined by Oakley (1981) in her early essay on interviewing women. Initially I was concerned that I might be criticised for becoming too involved with the women in my study and consequently that my research might be considered as less valuable. Despite this concern I had already taken the decision that I did not want to remain aloof and detached from these women because I felt I would not be able to fulfil the aims of my study. I was reassured by the fact that Strivers (1993) reminds us that we do not have to stand apart from our subjects:

An outsider may develop a different interpretation based on her or his own sense of significance of the events of a life, but the judgement that this outside interpretation is closer to the truth can be based on a premise that detachment makes it possible to 'eliminate bias' - The feminist interest in personal narrative is grounded in the claim that the subject's understanding of her life is inherently valid, maintaining that position coherently requires recognition of the interpretive movement in all knowledge acquisition.

(Strivers 1993: 420)

I do believe that there are advantages in being an 'insider' in the research process. In my case I had an intimate knowledge of the context of the research. In addition I had an appreciation of some of the opportunities and difficulties facing these women within their own schools. I was familiar with the management structures within the schools and know all of the headteachers professionally. In fact I had spent the last ten years serving on a local headteachers' group on which all of the heads in this district had been members. This gave me some insight into their management styles and personalities. I believe this insider knowledge at least provided an awareness of some of the experiences, opportunities and even difficulties these women deputies might face within their own schools.

I was drawn to the idea of narrative as a methodological tool for understanding women's experiences. I believed it would provide me with a method of capturing what was ethically honest in representing women's voices. It would help me to understand how their experiences had been socially and culturally constructed. Given that I wanted it to be a collaborative process I made the decision to avoid a distanced approach because I felt increasingly it would lead to a contrived focus on people's behaviour. A collaborative approach was important as I wanted the women to feel confident during the interviews. I began each interview with an 'ice-breaker' which I hoped would enable the women to relax and talk about themselves. Furthermore, my intention was to make the interview questions relevant to them as professionals. The interaction

between myself and the subjects would, I felt, generate rich material for analysis and interpretation.

3.6 Was a narrative approach a solution?

I was searching for an approach which would allow the individual participants an opportunity to describe their experience in their words and on their terms. In addition I was looking for a technique that would permit me as a researcher to explore concepts of gender, power, identity and leadership. These concepts are an important focus for this study and can be explored through narratives because they are not only descriptive, but also enable the researcher and their subjects to express emotions, thoughts and interpretations; this in turn will inevitably highlight the uniqueness of each woman. Narrative enables us to engage in a process of interpreting ourselves and our subject as we experience the world in which we exist. Josselson and Lieblich (1995) sum this up succinctly when they claim:

We work then with what is said and what is not said, within the context of the interview in which words are spoken to represent that life. We must then decide, recognise, recontextualize or abstract that life in the interest of reaching a new interpretation of raw data of experience before us.

(Josselson and Lieblich 1995: 1x)

Josselson and Lieblich (1995) are making the point that narrative approaches inevitably bring the researcher closer into process than quantitative and statistical methods can do. I would support this view, as a narrative approach recognises subjectivity and moves away from the idea of a neutral interpretation. I was aware that narratives tend to open up ambiguities and contradictions which the researcher will need to tease out in order to come to an understanding of the data generated. This process recognises emotion and this will produce a different kind of knowledge which will change according to the interpretation placed upon it. Walker and Unterhalter (2004) suggest:

...narrative supports a view of educational knowledge less as stable and unchanging, but rather as one critiquing the stories we hear and tell, not then making our knowledge less trustworthy, but inviting review and revisiting in the light of new perspectives as we attempt to be truthful.

(Walker and Unterhalter 2004: 384)

This knowledge is neither superior nor inferior to any other knowledge; it is simply partial (Griffiths, 1998). Garrick (1999), however, issues a note of caution that the researcher needs to be aware of when he claims that interpretation is a powerful shaper of knowledge about the world and lived experience. Garrick warns that interpretative accounts can inadvertently marginalise the voices of the subjects because of the emphasis the author puts on these stories, adding his or her perspective and authority. However, I would argue that by adopting strategies of careful listening to the participants' stories, giving them ample time to tell their story and regarding them as important in shaping the interpretation, this dilemma can be avoided. Furthermore, I need to be aware of the danger of putting my own feelings to the forefront, telling more about myself than the women in my study. Keeping a balance between the voices would be crucial. In fact I saw the interviews as a mutual process, one in which I could not distance myself from my subjects. I was determined to make sure that the women's voices were heard in the first instance and attempted to give them precedence over my own voice. I was aiming for an equal status for each of us in an attempt to make the final story a mutually constructed story. This is only likely to happen if a good relationship has been established between researcher and the people involved in the study.

The attraction of narrative approach as a method is that it has enabled me to make life experiences both relevant and meaningful in my own study, but as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out, it can be open to abuse. They refer to the situation where the researcher 'fakes the data'. They advise researchers embarking on this method of inquiry to be cautious and to take note of its critics. Where does the truth lie when we are trying to read meaning into what people say? Perhaps if the reader is able to say 'I recognise that, yes that

represents my experience', then I may claim that the reader can trust my interpretations (Schostak, 2002). Feminists would also argue that we have a duty to be honest and that we rely on our integrity as researchers to tell the truth and represent our subjects fairly. This is central to the research process whatever methods and methodology is chosen. I need to be aware and reflect upon my analysis and interpretation, recognising when it becomes my story rather than their story. There will be disparities between the meanings the women made of their lives and my interpretation, but an awareness may mean that these can be recognised and acknowledged, though not entirely eliminated. Nor should they be, as my researcher task is to analyse and interpret the data.

3.7 Trust and reciprocity

At this point I feel it would be relevant to discuss the relationship between myself and the women in this study. I believe the dialogue I had with them over many years was an advantage and would provide access to their views. I assumed that my story would resonate with theirs, and if this was the case we could begin to negotiate meaning and tell the story as it should be: a sharing of life experience. Nevertheless, I felt I had an awesome task ahead of me.

I adopted a non-hierarchical position in the interviews because I was convinced this would add to the richness of the research material. I was fortunate enough to have already established a professional relationship with most of these women, and was known by all of them before I began the study. This was an advantage, as I did not have to spend time establishing trust because it already existed. I wanted to create an interactive atmosphere in the interviews, but was aware of the problems this would create. My aim was to ensure that it was their voices that were the dominant feature in the interview: consequently this posed a problem. How was I to prevent the interview going off at a tangent if these women wanted to ask me questions during the interview process, without stifling subsequent discussion? In fact it was not a problem with the women of my own age. However, it did prove to be more difficult with the two younger

women who were interested in my own experiences. I was conscious here of different power-relations: they saw me as having greater experiences and were keen to know how I had coped with planning my own career. I found by being honest with them and briefly relating my own situation helped to establish a more equal relationship between us. For example, in one case we talked at length about our experiences of overtly gendered questions in interview situations. Nevertheless it was problematic, as I was concerned about my relationship with these two women. I began to question my motives at this point. Was I in fact in danger of telling them more about myself in the hope they would reveal more about themselves? I had less concern over this issue with the women of my age who saw me much more as a fellow deputy head rather than a researcher, or at best very much a novice involved in the research process.

All the time I had a strong sense of responsibility to represent them all accurately and to let their voices, as well as mine, be heard. Mauther and Doncet (1998) have emphasised the need to establish trust and honesty in research interviews and from the outset I had made my own position clear. I did this by making explicit my interest in feminist research and gender issues faced by women leaders working in schools. I did not expect them to share my views. At the same time I tended to be more cautious about my assumptions surrounding the patriarchal influences in schools. The reason for this was I was not sure that they would have experienced this to the same extent as myself. I work in a Catholic High School where patriarchal influences are still very much in existence. In my own case I had experienced the patronizing way even younger male colleagues addressed me; using terms such as 'love', 'dear' and 'miss'. These titles suggest that women are inferior and subordinate to male colleagues. In my school the sign on the Head's office door still reads 'Headmaster'. I was careful not to relate these particular experiences but rather to make explicit my feminist sympathies in more general terms. I did this by

being open about the purpose of the interviews: namely that they were part of the evidence I was collecting for a doctoral thesis.

I maintain that the relationship I had with these women resulted in them being prepared to talk openly at an early stage in the interviews. I did not have to spend time forming relationships with them. Many of them saw it as their role to help me in the process. I also talked to the women at length about the research and the wider audience it would reach by making it clear who would read the final study. I also agreed to provide feedback from the interviews and to let them read the transcripts. As far as it is possible I would try to protect their identities because I knew they would be very honest about their current situations and this would make them vulnerable to recognition.

3.8 Trust and confidentiality

I was conscious that because most of us worked in the same local area that confidentiality and anonymity would be a crucial issue. I decided to use pseudonyms as this will give anonymity to these women. I was made acutely aware of my responsibility for them after one woman repeatedly asked for reassurance about confidentiality throughout the interview. She was initially more guarded than the others, with many *silences and pauses and nuances* in her body language. I have considered these silences and asked myself why she was holding back. She had been given a great deal of responsibility and authority by her previous head and talked freely about her relationship with him. When it came to the present post-holder she was much more cautious. I know him to be a very competitive and aggressive character professionally. He has surrounded himself with numerous male colleagues and her position has been marginalised. Indeed, her vulnerability spoke through these silences. However, I believe that the fact she had known me for twenty years helped sustain that interview. She accepted my reassurances and my willingness to stop the interview and not use the material gained from it. Once the interview was over and the tape-recorder

had been turned off we talked at length about our joint careers and she agreed to let her interview be used.

3.9 Trust and masculine power

I found the interview with the male head interesting. The power-relations here were very different. In the first instance the interview had been arranged by his secretary and took place in his office. I had the feeling he wanted to take the initiative throughout the interview and show me how he had encouraged the women in his school to seek promotion. He often spoke, I thought, from a paternalistic and hierarchical position. I felt that it was a struggle to keep the interview as an equal and mutual process. I was acutely aware of the differences between me, the interviewer, and the male respondent and I would suggest this altered the dynamics of this interview. Denzin (1989) makes this point in his work on interviewing techniques and methods. He believes interviews between men and men, women and men and women and women will be very different in terms of power and confidence. There was a confidence and a self-assurance on his part in this interview that was not so pronounced in the interviews with the women. I believe that this is connected to an individual's self-esteem and their estimation of our abilities. My reading suggested that males frequently assume a confidence and a belief in their capabilities even in situations where they lack expertise or experience failure and setbacks (Davies, 1990). In this case my respondent swiftly moved on from any difficulties he faced and followed them up with a string of successes which he believed put the occasional difficulties and setbacks in perspective. The women were certainly less confident about their competencies, even in areas where they had considerable experience and success. I felt he wanted to play the dominant part in this interview and was there to pass on his knowledge to me.

At other times during the interview he was rather patronising towards me in particular and towards his female staff in general. As a result I had to be much more covert about my intentions as I felt that my feminist stance would irritate

him and I was less likely to gain the information I needed. But I wanted to listen to his story, and also to be aware of my own assumptions about male leadership, which were that it was likely to be more aggressive, competitive, self-reliant, less open and manipulative. There were some surprises here which I will discuss at a later stage.

Ball's (1990) explanation was useful when interviewing this man:

Discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations. Thus the possibilities for meaning and for definitions, are pre-empted through the social and institutional positions held by them who use them.

(Ball 1990: 2)

I found this quotation really summarised the power relationship I had experienced in this particular interview. This person assumed an authority over me in this situation, just as he did when he chaired a committee of which I was a member. He was the authority and the expert, ready to hand on his knowledge as superior to anything I could offer. This prompted me to consider whether I was engaging in his discourse or dwelling in my own. Yet I had a commitment not to make assumptions about his views before I had heard them, and to be open to any surprises and challenges to such assumptions.

3.10 Locating 'me' in the research: a case for reflexivity

The discourse and practice of masculine leadership positioned my male respondent differently from my female respondents both in relation to myself as a female researcher and to the discourses of management and institutional practices. Having explained the issues around trust and self-presentation in the interviews I now turn to the methodological issue of reflexivity.

It became clear from my reading that reflexivity is an important aspect of my methodology (Harding, 1991; Stanley and Wise, 1993). Reflexivity is not an easy concept to define but I use the term to imply a disciplined self-reflection.

Feminist writers have stressed and highlighted its importance in qualitative research. Morrison (2002) has indicated two important aspects of reflexivity. Firstly, that research orientations are shaped by and reflected in the social and educational world in which we operate. Secondly, that researchers need to be aware of the way such orientations affect the research, in every respect, including the decisions we make about our research topics. This concept requires me, as the researcher, to consider my interpretations and values and to interrogate these throughout the research process. Wilkinson (1988) points to the personal aspects of reflexivity, that of reflecting on myself in the research, as a woman, a feminist, as an individual. In my case my own career experiences have influenced both the selection of the questions, the conduct of the research and the interpretation of the data. It is embedded in my belief that women are still not fairly represented in senior management posts in my educational district. It is about my personal experience, but also reflects my recent commitment to feminist research. This is rooted in my own position as a woman and the treatment I have experienced both at school and in society.

Marshall (1986) describes how her own research fed back into her life experiences and influenced her commitment to feminism. This in fact, 'touched a chord' with me as I began to reflect on my own research. Marshall believes the researcher should explore and acknowledge 'who she is' because this will impact on the research. Haraway (1989) suggests it is useful for us to remember that the production of theory is a social activity, resulting in what she calls 'situated knowledges', and these are rooted in our social and cultural experiences. They are shaped by the time of their telling and the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves. She argues it is not enough to be reflexive, but we must strive to seek knowledge that will lead to social justice. Griffiths (1998) also recognises that no one can hope to do perfect research and argues that reflexivity is the process which recognises this assertion. Patai (1994) takes a different stance when she robustly argues that there has been too much self reflexivity and that it should be left out altogether. She writes:

..We are spending too much time wading in a morass of our own positionings. It's nice to say we need to account for ourselves, that we must not hide behind spurious invisibility or objectivity. But just how much space should we devote to self accounting and to the methodological discourse it has sprouted.

(Patai 1994: 64)

She goes on to claim that this type of self analysis does not produce better research: in her view, we are in danger of spending too much time contemplating our academic navels. Nevertheless I found reflexivity useful after I had interviewed a male head for it led me to consider the way I reacted in this situation. In chapter one I briefly described my feelings of inferiority when interviewing the male headteacher. Why did I feel this way? Did I begin to change during that interview? I came to a realisation that during this interview I needed to listen to what was being said, even though it conflicted at times with my own ideas and beliefs. If you are to do justice to your research participants it is as well to remember that if you are going 'to tell it how it is you must hear it how it is' (Reinharz 1988: 15). I recognised the power dynamics in the interview and began to listen to him and value the contribution he was making to my study.

But I did also have to take care not to exploit my subjects. As Ball (1991) reminds me, that even when I am dealing with sophisticated adults I must be wary of manipulating them into revealing more than they intended. I wish to expand this point in the next section on interviewing as a methodology.

3.11 The interviews as a methodology and method

I have argued that I needed to find a methodology that would be judged to be consistent with feminist values and I took a decision fairly early on in the doctoral programme to embrace a qualitative method for my research. My main reason for doing so was that I believed it would allow me to establish a more human and less mechanical relationship between myself and my subjects. I found the classic text by Oakley (1981) very useful in this respect because she advocates the interview process as a means of achieving such a relationship. It

seemed to offer a 'best fit' for my purposes, namely to find answers to my research questions. However, I am aware that this was a personal choice and I do not dismiss the benefits of quantitative methods in feminist research. Indeed, Coleman (2002) used a large survey as her research tool in her study of women headteachers. Usher (1996) makes the point that feminist theory now uses the full range of methods, and that there is no single, prescribed method. The important principle should be that the researcher chooses the most appropriate method in order to find answers to their particular research questions.

3.12 A methodology of friendship

In my particular case I chose to conduct interviews because I believed it would allow me to explore my subjects' perceptions of their professional aspirations and what had influenced the decisions and choices they had made during their careers. I felt that statistical data would be inappropriate and would not take into account emotions and feelings. I was attracted to the ideas put forward by Kong et al. (2000) who have taken a more radical approach to interviewing and refer to it as a 'methodology of friendship'. The idea that there is a partnership between the interviewer and the interviewee is not a new idea; it has been advocated by feminist writers over many years (Mauthner and Doncet, 1998; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992; Standing, 1998). These writers have maintained that a less traditional approach helps to create a richer narrative. In these cases the interviewer does not distance herself from her subjects and rejects the idea that a neutral stance should be adopted in the interview process. Oakley (1981) argues for open engagement, wanting to establish a close relationship with the women in her study. I share her belief that this is a decidedly feminist approach. I except Oakley's assertion that the traditional interview method is embedded in masculine culture and masculine traits of objectivity, detachment and hierarchy: in her view a masculine paradigm.

I recognise Oakley's approach could be seen as problematic because, as Reinharz (1992) comments science is often held up as a 'model' discipline and

its research methods should be followed by all researchers. It is accompanied by an underlying expectation that the researcher should also be objective and sceptical. But, if one believes that it is important to establish a relationship between the researcher and the respondent then perhaps 'scepticism' should be replaced by 'mutuality', and if this is the case would it necessarily invalidate any scientific claim made for the research? I have argued that feminist theory does not fit easily into traditional established practices. Feminists do not regard their respondents as objects of their study, or instruments for extracting data. They do not believe that by taking feelings or emotions into account jeopardises the research. Thus, I began by accepting the statements made in the stories told by the women in my study, and we began from a position of mutual trust. My intention was to listen empathetically to their stories, which I anticipated would be told in a truthful and honest way, necessarily shaped, however, by the time and circumstances of their telling. They, and I, may tell our stories differently in the future.

3.13 Interviews are not an easy option

I have been privileged that the people in my study have been eager to share their confidences and experiences. Experiences that have shaped their lives included childhood experiences, routes into teaching, family relationships, career developments and disappointments, and their future aspirations. These women were prepared to talk openly about opportunities and constraints they had faced throughout their careers. What was surprising was that the interviews gave these women the opportunity, in some cases for the first time, to reflect on their careers in some depth. There was also recognition of the ways in which gender is conceptualised and lived out in their schools. It was interesting to find that, although all saw the implications and importance of gender in their pupils, some had not seen it as an issue in their own lives. For some of the women the questions were challenging and required them to think deeply about work experiences. It was also demanding for me as a novice researcher. I was extremely nervous when I came to do the first interview and so was my subject.

I knew I had to listen carefully, take note of their body language and facial expressions. I needed to respect their pauses, and not jump in with my next question. I also needed to pick up cues and respond to them but always be careful not to put them off telling their story.

I realised at an early stage it was impossible for me to take detailed notes during the interview. I needed to listen and watch. This patience had its rewards when these women began to share some of their most personal experiences: in one woman's case finding her mother's body at the age of fourteen. She painfully recalled the consequences of that unexpected death. In another woman's case it was the failure of a marriage, being left with a son in Asia, and having to return home to restart her life. At this point it is pertinent to give further consideration to ethical issues.

3.14 Questions of ethics

In line with other research methodologies, consideration needs to be given to the question of ethics. This should be a central concern for feminist researchers because they emphasise honesty and trust as crucial aspects of their work. If there is a desire for social justice then one might expect that ethical issues would be taken as read. However, I cannot assume that this is the case and I needed to be aware of the possible pitfalls and problems that were just as likely to surface in this type of research as in any other. I found the work of Riddell (1989) particularly poignant to my own research study. As a sociologist and feminist researcher she writes about her dilemmas over definitions of honesty, her concerns about the power relations between the researcher and participants and the degree of responsibility she has for those who participate in her research. I also needed to consider the manner in which experiences and stories are presented. In my case these women were not vulnerable or underprivileged and yet they are still open to be exploited by me as a researcher. I had known most of the women in my study for a number of years but I recognised that the way I represented them would be partial (McRobbie, 1982). Nevertheless, I

have a responsibility to portray them fairly and accurately. In addition, after the interviews, I began to question if I had in any way exploited the situation by stressing that I was a naïve researcher. Frequently I considered my motives for doing so, wondering if I did this subconsciously in the hope they would reveal more about themselves because they saw me as a fellow professional, rather than as a doctoral student producing a dissertation. In other cases, did I exploit some of the women's desire to talk? I believe that an awareness of these stumbling blocks made me more scrupulous in that I constantly questioned my integrity throughout the process. It was always my intention to make sure my subjects were fully aware of the intentions and purpose of the research. I offered to let them read the transcript and raise any issues or feelings of misrepresentation with me.

Yet another dilemma was how I ensured their anonymity. We work in a relatively small town and I wanted to protect their identities and ensure they were not harmed professionally by any revelations they made in our discussions. But could I be sure they really understood that my account would be read, eventually, by a wider audience? I am conscious that I need to disguise the location so that they could not be identified through recognition of the town in which we all work. Again, there was further soul searching over the interview with the male headteacher. Was I fair to this man? Did I allow him to tell his story even though it conflicted with mine? Was I right to hide this from him so I would not alienate him during the interview? Throughout the process I kept one thought in the fore front of my mind: what would it feel like if someone were doing this to me? This sensitivity was intended to ensure that I would not intentionally exploit nor harm my respondents, although one cannot guarantee how the study might be interpreted by diverse readers.

3.15 The respondent sample

My research sample is small: this is because both interviewing and transcribing is time consuming when one has limited time and financial constraints. I was

studying for a doctorate on a part-time basis and had to be realistic about the time and resources I had available because of my own professional working commitments. I was grateful to my supervisor here, who repeatedly made me take stock of the data from my sample and decide if I had sufficient material to fulfil the research purposes. Moreover, small samples are not unusual when conducting feminist research which is purposive and one is dealing with specific experiences; the criteria for selection were women in this area who were aspiring to leadership positions.

3.16 Collecting the data

At this point I intend to describe the methods used to collect my data.

The interviews with the four deputy heads, the two female heads, the two aspiring deputy heads, the male headteacher and governor were conducted over a six month period as outlined in chapter one. The criteria for selection were based on the knowledge that these women were either currently seeking promotion or had been recently promoted. All but the two female heads taught in the educational district in which I worked and so access was not a problem. I wanted to interview a governor in order to provide a different perspective; a view from someone who had experience of interviewing candidates seeking headship posts and maybe influential in an individual's career development. The male headteacher was selected because I believed that he had a more gender-inclusive approach than other heads in the town. As a headteacher he is in a powerful position, capable of cultivating or limiting the career development of his staff.

I initially contacted each person by telephone and explained in detail the purpose of my research and asked if they would be willing to participate. Following these conversations a letter was sent to each individual stating again the purpose of my research, outlining the involvement I required and the process to be followed. A second telephone call was made to check that they were still willing to take part in my research study. I also reminded them that I would

like, if they were comfortable with it, to tape-record the interviews. I checked this again with each of them on the day of the interview. The interviews were arranged to take place at a time and venue which suited my participants and to make sure that they were comfortable. I wanted to establish a convivial atmosphere in which to conduct these interviews so that the participants felt relaxed and at ease with the process. I hoped this would encourage them to speak freely. I was aware that all of them were extremely busy professionals and I would be making additional demands on their time. The interviews needed to be well organised, check to make sure that the tape-recorder was in working order and that my schedule was to hand to remind me to cover the main areas of interest outlined in my research questions. This worked well in all but my first interview with Lesley. She cancelled the first interview; initially she had suggested this take place after school at my home as it was on her route home. We re-arranged the interview, this time it was to be at her school but when I arrived Lesley suggested we go to a near-by hotel. This in fact reaffirmed my initial view that some of my participants may find 'neutral' ground more conducive. School was her territory, my home was mine. The important fact was that she needed to feel comfortable. This was my first interview and I was extremely nervous. In hindsight I may have been able to prevent this by conducting a pilot interview. The interview also highlighted another potential problem, in that the tape-recording picked up background noises, piped music and chatter from the hotel staff. This made transcribing the interview difficult and time consuming. Nevertheless, I was pleased with the interview for, despite these difficulties; Lesley provided me with some rich data and was prepared to talk at length about both her personal and private life.

The first interview lasted about one and a half hours and the other interviews were to follow this pattern. The dates and times of the interviews were recorded. The transcriptions were made within a short time of the interviews and in detail, so that none of the nuances would be lost. In addition I made notes immediately after each interview, noting any silences, and recording hints from

their body language which I believed would add to my analysis at a later stage. I also made pen portraits of all the participants to help me to focus on them as individuals when I came to examine these vast accounts for specific themes. The transcripts were extremely detailed. I offered each interviewee the opportunity to read the detailed transcripts, but none of them took this up. I believe this was because I knew them all and had an established relationship with them. They trusted me to portray them accurately and to, as far as it is possible, protect their identities. This I have done by disguising not only the individuals but also the schools and area in which they work. I now had a mass of evidence and needed to continue with the analysis in a structured way.

3.17 The dilemmas of analysis and interpretation

The constant dilemma was how I would represent these stories truthfully, and also do justice to the women involved. It required hours of work reading and re-reading the transcripts, listening to the tape-recorded voices, immersing myself in the data. I needed to do this in order to know how the ways these women's identities had been formed and the way this influenced their working lives and careers. I wanted to understand how they had overcome the barriers they had faced and the circumstances and experiences that had influenced their career choices and what had motivated them to seek promotion. I wondered if I would find any similarities in these stories. Finally: would any contradictions emerge within and across their accounts of their career experiences and aspirations?

I looked for patterns, and identified themes in my data in order to solve the emerging puzzles and began to categorise them. I had in mind the conceptual frames such as gender, identity formation, power and leadership approaches, discussed in the theoretical chapter perspective, and these certainly shaped how I came to interrogate the data but I was careful not to try and force my data into these boxes at this stage. After hours of reading and listening to the tape-recorded interviews, themes began to emerge: a personal and professional

identity, choices in career paths, rejections, risk, safety, security, vocation versus job, family and schooling biographies, routes and pathways into headship and the diversity of these women. What also became clear was that these women's professional lives could not be separated from their wider histories and cultures. These themes also reflected the choices that the women had made themselves, and the choices they had had made for them by the actions of others. It was becoming clear that gender, age and class had influenced their experiences and expectations and impacted upon their perception of themselves as potential leaders (Blackmore, 1999; Bradley, 1996; Coleman, 2002; Hall, 1996). Themes began to emerge that reflected my own assumptions: that the schools are organised in a way that emphasises masculine cultures and values. It also had implications for the way the women thought they were perceived by others.

Having identified the themes, the task was to move on to a further analysis of the data within the conceptual framework of gender, identity formation, power, and leadership approaches without corraling the data and the women's experiences. Up to this point intuition had played a part, too, when considering how these concepts impacted on the aspirations and career structures experienced by these women. This may seem an unorthodox approach in identifying key issues, but it was intuition which initially led me to follow certain ideas about the way these concepts might have influenced these women's career paths. I found that at this early stage I was relying on partly my own instincts rather than logical reasons for the choices I was making. I now want to turn to this in more detail. As an academic researcher I was required to theorize my respondent's accounts and locate them within the wider theoretical debates.

3.18 An account of the analysis of the data

I now want to give an account of the analysis of my data. Here I focus on the themes identified in the conceptual framework as outlined in my literature

review (Arnot, 2002; Barr, 1999; Blackmore, 1999; Bradley, 1996; Griffiths, 1998; Munro, 1998 and Weedon, 1987). I found observations made by Mauthner and Doucet (1998) particularly poignant because descriptions of data analysis can often make the process seem rather static and simplistic. Yet this is not the case, it is a dynamic process, as they aptly write:

.....data analysis is not a discreet phase of the research process confined to the moments when we analyse interview transcripts. Rather it is an ongoing process that takes place throughout, and often extends beyond, the life of the research project.

(Mauthner and Doucet: 1998: 124)

I previously acknowledged that my interpretation began when I made decisions about who would be and who would not be included in this study. It continued during the interviews, in the nature of the questions I asked. My questions inevitably sent the respondents in one direction rather than another. It is reflected in the way I pursued certain issues with them and ignored others. I was in fact shaping the interviews and following my own analytical thinking and interpreting meanings from their stories. Having made this explicit I now turn to give my account.

In the early stages I read the transcripts in order to understand the individual stories. I looked for the main events and influences in the stories I was being told, and began colour coding the relevant texts. For example the experiences encountered by the women as they struggled to become leaders and later when they became leaders. I went on to complete further readings to find discourses of gender and identity. Here I was looking for personal statements that pointed to gendered experiences and identity formation; discourses of confidence, rejection, risk, safety and security. What light would these discourses shed on the relationships between personal and professional identities? Again the relevant parts of the text were colour coded. Further readings of the transcripts

were made, this time the focus on contradictions and ambiguities around power (Barr, 1999; Blackmore, 1999; Connell, 2002; Griffiths, 1995; Munro, 1998).

I began to highlight quotes from the transcripts which I would use as evidence to support both my analysis and interpretation and address the research questions. At this point I once more acknowledge that my own values, beliefs and interpretations of the literature and theory needed to be recognised and made explicit as this would influence the evidence I had identified, (Wilkinson, 1988). Had I listened and heard the stories being spoken by the people I had interviewed? At the same time had I acknowledged that my own position would be influenced by what I heard and read? Nevertheless, I attempted throughout the interviews to pay attention to what each person was telling me but accept that this was:

.....within the context of this relationship this research setting and at a particular location in the social world, rather than making statements about who this person is or voice is.

(Mauthner and Doucet: 1998; 137)

Another reading followed in order to reflect upon my interpretation; ensuring that I could claim I had rigorously related the data to my conceptual framework (Morrison, 2002).

The time had come when I needed to begin to 'cut-up' the transcripts and turn this vast volume of data into a manageable form. I proceeded to 'break-up' each transcript into a number of themes, some overlapping, for example family and career choices. Other discourses centred on the absence of career plans, the importance of mentors leadership styles and leadership performance. It was a long process because I chose to do it manually rather than use a computer. I found it was the only way I could view the whole and keep the individuals in my mind. The computer screen seemed to give a fragmented picture. Finally having organised my data to suit my preferred way of working I was ready to

continue to the next stage of my analysis and interpretation, but before doing so I add a postscript.

3.19 The methodology is not straightforward

I had discovered that research is a messy process. How did I account for the data that had been generated? There were contradictions in the data that I had not anticipated or expected. This led to an initial confusion, until the realisation dawned. This is the very nature of qualitative research that focuses on biographical or narrative accounts. I had to constantly remind myself of Butler's (1990) assertion that individuals are not always logical beings, their experiences are neither stable nor static, their identities are not fixed, nor coherent, but are constantly shifting and are contradictory. How, then, was I to ensure that the data would be analysed in the right way, a fair way? This was a difficult question and I puzzled over it for some time. In fact, when considering situated knowledges I came to recognise they could be analysed quite differently by others. They could take this data and find different interpretations from mine. I have acknowledged previously that my own experiences have influenced and impacted on the data because of the questions I have chosen to ask. Furthermore, by making decisions to extend or curtail certain aspects of these stories I was shaping the stories and inviting possible contradictions. Similarly, the way I responded emotionally to what I was hearing may also influence the interpretations. I found some comfort in Plummer's (1995) suggestion when he writes:

I have slowly come to believe that no stories are true for all time and space, we invent stories with passion, they are momentarily true, we cling to them, they become our lives, and then we move on. Clinging to the story, changing the story, reworking it. But somewhere behind all this story telling there are real active, embodied impassioned lives. It is a process of peeling back stories to reveal better ones? And if so when do we know the story is better? Or is it a constant re-adjustment of stories to be aligned with the time and the place of their telling? I am suggesting here that multiple stories engulf us, and we need the tools for distinguishing between layers of stories and even layers of truth.

(Plummer 1995: 170)

By constantly examining my own assumptions and acknowledging the impact this will have on my interpretation, by relating the data to my conceptual framework I am justified in my interpretations and understanding of them. Others may disagree or may come up with a different interpretation. That is the nature of the methodology I chose for this research. I am aware that the women I interviewed made choices about what they wanted to reveal at that particular moment in time; at another time some things may have been different. For example I interviewed a young middle manager; she has now been promoted to assistant Head. Will her story have changed because of her new position in school?

It is through language that we share meaning, engage in discourses. By making explicit my involvement in this study I can therefore claim authority for my interpretations. In the next chapter I provide profiles of the women in my study and present the analysis and interpretation of the data generated by my research.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

This chapter deals with an analysis and interpretation from the wealth of data generated from a series of unstructured interviews with six women in senior positions in secondary schools. I begin with their biographical profiles and then turn to address the themes identified from theory and my data. I move on to look at the women's career trajectories, focusing on the opportunities and constraints they have encountered on their journey into leadership. Later, I consider the women as leaders and discuss the discourses that emerged. These discourses include rejection, leadership performance and the ambiguities surrounding their leadership aspirations.

I have adopted a narrative approach as this method acknowledges that the stories I recorded are not neutral; they represent situated ways of knowing and understanding a particular group of women. I therefore believe it is appropriate to begin with the profiles of six women in this study. I do this to convey the richness of the data they provided and to illuminate how these women identified themselves and to show how they appeared to me as the researcher. I am not claiming a naïve correspondence between the real persons and my representations of them here; nonetheless I have attempted to capture their diversity as women and the biographical pathways they have negotiated. There are commonalities and differences, as they are not a homogeneous group; albeit their experiences are viewed through a gendered lens. These portrayals are also intended to capture and represent both life and educational experiences leading up to the women's present-day careers. While I do not attempt to analyse their stories at this stage they are, of course, mediated by my selection and some interpretation. Nonetheless, at this point, these portrayals are intended to be descriptive rather than analytical.

4.1 Profiles of the participants

Lesley Wharton (21/10/2004)

Lesley is in her late 40's, a tall woman, casually dressed who appeared rather nervous at the beginning of the interview. She was the only person who initially cancelled our first appointment. She wanted reassurance about the project, specifically about its purposes. I felt that she was a sensitive, thoughtful woman prone to self questioning and reflection. She said from the outset that she has to be really competent in what she does; only then does she have the confidence to move forward. Lesley has been married twice, has three sons, the eldest by her first husband whom she met while working for Voluntary Service Overseas in the Far East while still in her early 20's. She was born in a North Midlands town to working class parents. She had an elder sister who has acted as child minder to her two younger children aged 12 and 14 for the last 12 years. Her parents are still alive and live in a neighbouring street. She was brought up a Catholic but has since rejected this faith:

Even though I am no longer a Catholic there are bits of it that are still a feature of my life, the guilt that faith instils in you. I rejected the elitism of the church, the idea that they were right and were the chosen ones.

At the age of eleven she left her Catholic primary school and moved to a girls' grammar school. Here she says she had little careers guidance and did not have any idea of what she wanted to do. She knew she was interested in people and had a sense of fair play. She believes this was sparked off by an incident that had happened soon after joining high school. She intervened to protect some young Pakistani boys from racist taunts and bullying by white boys in a local park. She says from that moment on she began to challenge racism, both at home and school. She became close to a black girl whom she still regards as a good friend. Her feeling of social and racial justice was further strengthened by her own experiences in the Far East where she began to know and feel the prejudice against her from the local people.

There was little involvement from her parents in her career plans. They believed that Lesley 'being happy' was important but left it to her to decide which route to take. Consequently she followed a friend to teacher training college, copying her application. Her sense of vocation came after her first teaching practice. She says she loved teaching and knew, from that moment on, it was to be her chosen career.

After teaching in the Far East she returned to England with her young son after a failed marriage. She was the main breadwinner and had to find a teaching post. Her first post in this country was in a school where 15% of the pupils were bilingual, mostly from Indian and Pakistani backgrounds. During her time at the school she was given a secondment to write materials for pupils for whom English was a second language. Although she found the work interesting she missed teaching and wanted to get back into the classroom. She applied for a job as Special Needs Co-ordinator which she did for five years before applying for a post of assistant head, in a medium-sized, mixed-race, comprehensive school.

Four years ago she applied for a deputy headship in her present school. Her main responsibilities were for the pastoral care and welfare of the pupils, again in a mixed-race comprehensive school. She has always been interested in multicultural education and has a determination to ensure that pupils are exposed to good teaching and have a variety of interesting and challenging learning experiences. She enjoys being in the classroom and is an extremely good practitioner, according to both her head and her colleagues.

Debbie Draycott (25/10/2004)

Debbie is in her early fifties, married with two grown-up children. Debbie is a 'larger than life' character; she appears to be very confident and is very

conscious about her appearance. The way she is perceived by others is very important to her. She was brought up in a middle-class family; her father had a powerful job as a managing director in a large food company. When she was 16 her father remarried after the death of her mother and she was moved from her English school to a school in Scotland that seemed completely alien to her. She did not do particularly well in this system and was pushed into teacher-training college to study home economics. She hated the college and the course, but despite trying to persuade her parents to let her leave and do something different she was told that this was not an option. Despite her experience at training college she enjoyed her first teaching post in London, where she began teaching in a girls' school. She greatly admired the leadership style offered by her first head. The school population was made up of 90% from a West Indian background. She says:

These kids were tough but it was a good school to work in because the head was a fantastic disciplinarian.

However, she claims that, more than a teaching career, she wanted a family and stability. She says that life in her teenage years was difficult after her mother's death, as her father travelled with his job; she and her brother were faced with a succession of house-keepers before her father remarried. She was keen to marry someone who 'had a bit of money and could provide a nice house'. She moved to live in Yorkshire with her husband and worked for three years before her first child was born. In this school she taught environmental science for a term before being given a permanent job in the special needs department. Three years later her second child was born and her husband had a new job in Birmingham. A neighbour offered child care and Debbie was able to go back to work as a supply teacher, covering a maternity leave in a local school. After the maternity leave cover finished, she was offered a part time job in the special needs department. She was promoted and became head of year; two years later she was again promoted to special needs coordinator, after completing a part time Bachelor of Education degree. She has remained in the same school for over 20 years. In 2000 a vacancy occurred in the senior management team

within the school and she applied and was successful, and was appointed deputy head to look after staffing and personnel issues. She now only teaches about six lessons a week; she prefers being out of the classroom and enjoys the administrative tasks.

Mary Statham. (09/11/2004)

Mary is in her late 50s and is married with one grown-up daughter. Mary is a very formal woman and has a dignified, somewhat reserved style. She thinks carefully before she speaks, often appearing to be 'guarded'. She describes herself as a very private person wanting to keep her private and professional lives separate. She comes from a middle-class family: her mother was a headteacher and her aunt was a deputy head and they had a profound influence on her choice of career:

Let's face it I came from the sort of grammar school background where you did not get career guidance. I went to university and it was assumed I would go into teaching because it was a good profession for women. I got a good history degree and looking back I would probably have been better going into law.

She went to Bristol University where she studied history and attained a first class degree. She began to study for a doctorate (PhD) but this gave up in order to follow a Post graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course. She also said she was tired of studying and wanted 'to do something more practical'. After completion of the PGCE course she returned to her home town and married her partner whom she had met at university. She was approached by the head of a local grammar school and was offered a job teaching History to advanced level. Two years later she applied and was successful in obtaining a head of department's position. From this post she moved to become head of sixth form within the school, a job she enjoyed. It was while in this job she became pregnant and resigned. She would not have considered maternity leave, as both she and her husband believed it was important for her to be at home for at least the first three years of their child's life.

When her daughter was four years old she returned to teaching on a part time basis as her parents were able to offer adequate child care. She was given a head of department job in the same school two years later:

Career-wise I started again and had to start to climb the ladder again. It took me two or three years to get back to where I was before I had my daughter.

Her career route in teaching is grounded in the academic rather than the pastoral and she continued her promotion route by applying for a curriculum post at deputy head level. She explained:

I have always been ambitious, wanting to be part of a school's leadership team.

Mary eventually became the deputy head in a very large comprehensive school. She believes that leadership brings power and isolation and she has by and large enjoyed her post, remaining in one school for 28 years. Her husband also worked in the same school at a middle management level and this, in Mary's opinion, did not generate any tensions.

Anita Odell. (10/01/2005)

Anita is in her early 40s, married with one daughter who is profoundly deaf. She is a vivacious character, very feminine in her appearance, wearing bright clothes and large pieces of jewellery. She speaks with enthusiasm about her experiences and was eager to share them. She was very reflective in the interviews and enjoyed having the opportunity to talk about and rationalise her ideas. She was born in Birmingham and went to a secondary modern school that became a comprehensive school while she was in year nine. She remembers being called out of a year 11 class to be told she was to do the General Certificate of Education (GCE) rather than the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE). She remarks that it was the first time anyone had hinted that she was clever. Her careers education was poor: she was expected to go into secretarial work and because she liked art and textiles the careers teacher

suggested she become a secretary in a textile factory. Her working class parents were pleased when she decided to stay on in the sixth form and she adds:

When you were a girl in the sixth form you go into teaching; really there is nothing else.

She did not consider options in other professions that might have allowed her to combine art and needlework, or to go to art college to study textiles or design. She went off to teacher training college in the South West and began to specialise in ceramics. She wanted to leave as she was not enjoying the course but she felt unable to do so. She felt guilty because her parents had supported her financially at college: to leave would be seen as letting them down. After successfully completing her college course she stayed in the South West and did a variety of jobs for the next six years, none of which had any connection with teaching. The jobs she did were mainly unskilled in the hotel industry before she set up her own business, making jewellery. After a year she decided she was not making a success of being self employed and took a job at an army camp, serving in the officer's mess. After two years it dawned on her that:

I was probably more or at least equally intelligent as these guys, so what the dickens am I doing here. It was then I decided to look for a teaching post and applied for lots of jobs all over the country.

She only had one reply from a failing school in the Black Country where she was the only applicant. Anita had been in post for a year when the school had to make a teacher redundant. She volunteered for redundancy and was offered three other jobs within the authority. She took one at a very good multi-racial school with a dynamic, but rather traditional, headteacher. To illustrate this she stated that only two years prior to her joining the school had women been allowed to wear trousers, and then only as suits. The school was well organised with a good leadership team and well-structured meetings were organised by both the pastoral and academic teams.

From there she moved for promotion, becoming a head of year in a Birmingham school before moving into another school within the city. She was given numerous opportunities within this school to bring in new initiatives for improving the quality of teaching, based on a course organised by David Hopkins at Nottingham University. This post gave her the opportunity to develop her leadership skills. From there she began to apply for a deputy headship and was successful in securing a post in a comprehensive school serving 1000 pupils. The school's intake is mainly from two council estates and is almost totally white working-class.

Anita's career has largely been in very difficult and even failing schools. Throughout her teaching career she has had moments when she has seriously thought of giving up teaching and once again starting her own business. She has a strong dedication to equal opportunities agendas and is very fastidious in working through the policy agendas she is given to re-write or re-create. She works hard but is often disappointed when her initiatives are not received with enthusiasm, or fail to motivate and encourage others. She often puts this down to the lack of support she receives from colleagues and the financial constraints of the school budget.

Siobhan Walsh (02/12/2004)

Siobhan is in her middle 40s and single. She is quite small, very neat and precise. She was also very reflective and welcomed the opportunity to speak about her experiences openly and frankly. Her parents moved from Ireland to Birmingham when she was a young child, which had a profound effect on her in terms of:

...wondering who I was and where I was. I sometimes think that that has influenced the fact I have moved more readily to posts away from home and family. I always thought I was not quite sure where I belonged.

She has an older sister who is married with a family and they live next door to their ageing parents. Siobhan attended a selective Catholic school within the

city and toyed with the idea of studying medicine but she felt her science grades were not good enough. However, she said she wanted to be a teacher from an early age and enjoyed organising her friends into classes and 'pretending I was a teacher'. She went off to university, studied French, and followed this with a PGCE course.

She began her teaching in a girl's mixed-race school in Birmingham; she looks back on the school with disappointment. Her perception of the school is that the pupils were 'let down' because of the low aspirations and limited opportunities offered to them. After this experience she was anxious to move into the Catholic sector and got a job in a large comprehensive school in Birmingham. This was in the area she had been brought up in as a teenager. She and her parents were members of a church that many of her pupils also attended. She was promoted to a pastoral post within the school, from here she moved to become a deputy head.

She has always enjoyed teaching and the buzz she gets from being in the classroom with young people around her. She has a strong commitment to her Catholic faith and has been successful in obtaining a headship, the first in a small Catholic school and the second in a larger school with 1200 students in the suburbs of a large Midlands town. Siobhan has a strong conviction that there is something special about Catholic education: it involves a desire to develop what she sees as every pupil's God-given talents, that the school should adhere to gospel values of forgiveness and reconciliation, and that we should all learn to treat others as we wish to be treated.

Fiona Burrows. (11/01/2005)

Fiona is 55, married with two grown up daughters. She is very friendly and was eager to help with the research. She, more than any of the other women, was aware of the way gender impacts on her professional life and had begun to embrace feminism and make it explicit in her leadership role. She was brought

up in a middle-class family. Her parents were strict Evangelical Christians, attending church three times on a Sunday. Fiona was the youngest of four children. Her brother and sisters have, in Fiona's opinion, been very conformist, always doing what their parents wanted. It was a very traditional family; her mother stayed at home. Her parents wanted their children to have a good education, but had no ambition for their daughters other than to get married and have a family. Fiona says she did not want to be like her mum:

I wanted to be financially independent and follow one of the professions that male members of our family had followed, which happened to be teachers and doctors. I did not relish the thought of spending my life at home like my mother, being a housewife.

Fiona finished her university course in theology at Bath University. She was determined to be far away from her family home and in her mind the distance would lessen the influence her parents could assert over her. She had gained a good honours degree and decided to join her new husband, a post-graduate student, in the Midlands, and to complete her PGCE. She said they initially made a conscious decision not to have children. She had her first teaching job in a rural comprehensive school of approximately 1000 pupils. She stayed there for 14 years. She eventually decided that she would like a family and opted to take maternity leave.

Fiona made teaching her career and maintained that by the time she had reached senior management level her educational philosophy was clearly developed. It has also been influenced by her Christian upbringing which was rather repressive.

She describes a typical Sunday in her childhood:

We had to go to church three times and Sunday School too, no playing or having fun.

Nevertheless, her religious faith developed and is more liberal than she experienced in her childhood. She believes her desire for social justice in

education is rooted in her religious beliefs. She has developed a very caring attitude to both colleagues and pupils which she maintains is part of her religious conviction. Fiona always looks for the positive in people and almost feels guilty when she criticises other people.

4.2 Becoming leaders

I now want to consider the gendered opportunities and constraints faced by these women on their route to leadership positions. Such constraints and opportunities are interlinked and difficult to separate. The dominant narrative appears to be that of constraints, but, within this structure and discourse, individual women are provided with opportunities which they take up to negotiate their careers, albeit for the most part with difficulty. I will begin by exploring their career trajectories and focus on their individual experiences and influences that have significantly affected them along the way.

4.3 Family and early career choices

Three of the women, Debbie, Lesley and Anita, applied to go to teacher-training college. Lesley and Anita were the first in their family to experience higher education; this was not an uncommon route for women, from their social background, into higher education (Reay, 2003). They had little help in choosing the appropriate courses from either their teachers or their families; this is not unusual where families have had little or no knowledge or experience of higher education (Reay et al., 2001). Nonetheless, the important thing for them was they were going away to college. Lesley and Anita spoke about their working-class parents being immensely proud of them, rather than being particularly ambitious for their daughters. Their mothers were housewives and their fathers worked in local factories. Debbie came from an entirely different background. Her middle-class parents were disappointed that she had not achieved more at school, and saw teacher training as a rather second rate, but nevertheless acceptable option for her:

I was pushed into teaching. My father said that as you have not made it to university, you are going to go into teaching.

But Lesley enjoyed her college course and loved her teaching experiences from the outset. Anita and Debbie have a different story to tell: both disliked the courses they had chosen and wanted to give up. Debbie's reaction was to ask her parents if she could leave; they were adamant that she stayed and complete the course. Anita also stayed on her course out of a sense of guilt; her parents would have been disappointed had she left college, and they had also made financial sacrifices in order to support her education.

There is quite a contrast between these career paths and those of Siobhan, Mary and Fiona. These three women went to university and came from middle-class families where both parents worked as professionals either in education or medicine. Their parents had been to university and expected their daughters to follow suit and to do well. Siobhan and Fiona eventually became headteachers, and Mary a deputy in one of the largest comprehensive schools in the country.

When I questioned them about their career plans they all said teaching had not figured in their minds: Mary had considered law and Siobhan medicine. However, on completing their degrees they drifted into PGCE courses, as they believed teaching was a good profession for women. Despite parental and self aspirations, they still opted for a gendered career into a profession seen to be for women. Mary says:

I thought about going into the legal profession. I had got a first in History but then my family was steeped in teaching, both my mother and my aunt had become teachers and I guess I just followed them.

Fiona said that although her parents had expected her to go to university there were no real goals set for her, unlike her brothers who, in her parents' eyes, needed a well-paid profession in order to support a family:

I was just expected to do something I would enjoy until I found a husband and became dependent upon him for myself and the taken- for-granted children I would have.

Fiona saw it differently; marriage was a way to break away from home. She was determined not to have children and followed her husband when he was promoted. Nevertheless, she believes:

Because of my rather repressive religious upbringing it took ages for me to really have the confidence just to be myself. I did not want to be a mother because I valued my independence. Eventually I did change my mind. I had children and to my mother's disgust, took maternity leave with the intention of going back and arranging child care for my daughter. I stayed in the same school for fourteen years; it was close to home. I didn't seek promotion, being employed full time was enough. You know even then other people disapproved of me working never mind seeking more responsibility.

Mary gave up teaching when she became pregnant with her only child. Four years later she was approached by a local head with a job offer. Her parents agreed to provide the necessary childcare and she returned to teaching, and was promoted to a middle-management position after two years of working as a classroom teacher. It was to take Anita even longer to achieve a middle-management post. She was a single parent with a profoundly deaf child. She was the sole breadwinner but could not take on any extra responsibilities:

I felt guilty enough not being able to spend more time with my child, as it was I was the only 'wage earner'. I didn't have a choice. Anne was a naughty child too, so it was always stressful at home and often that spilled over into my job. Those early years were very difficult until I met Chris. Marriage allowed me to move forward and look for promotion. Anne also got better as she got older and received more specialist help.

Siobhan is a single woman and childless and believes this has been an advantage for her. She did not experience the sense of guilt felt by Fiona and Anita over working and being mothers:

Having no ties I have always been free to move to where I wanted to work. My parents are fairly old but my sister and her family live next door and have taken that responsibility, leaving me free to follow my career.

After her first teaching post, Siobhan moved into the Catholic sector and has remained in church schools. Her route to headship began when she became a head of year; she then moved on to become a pastoral deputy.

4.4 The absence of career plans

None of the women I interviewed had stepped back in order to plan their careers. Siobhan claims she only thought of applying for promotion when:

I think someone in school said, 'You ought to be looking for promotion.' I remember distinctly turning around to see who else was there. It never crossed my mind he was talking to me. I was puzzled where had that come from, but it did make me think that I should begin to look for deputy headships.

Whereas Debbie and Mary believe their success has often been down to luck, being in the right place at the right time, and that has resulted in them being promoted internally:

I have been lucky in my school, securing a number of promotions. The prospect of staying in one place for 20 years would be unheard of today. Younger teachers know the benefits of clear planning and staying at one school is seen as a disadvantage, having no breadth to your experience.

(Debbie).

Fiona said that her daughter, also a teacher, asked her if she had ever planned to become a headteacher:

I told my daughter it had never crossed my mind. It wasn't unusual either, no one I know (I'm talking about women) has ever claimed to have planned their careers. In fact it was only about ten years ago, when I proved to myself I was a good deputy, did I ever consider applying for headship. Mind you, I decided to do the leadership qualification N.P.Q.H., (National Professional Qualification for Headteachers) before even considering making an application.

The reasons for moving on to a promoted position varied, but in almost every case they were taken at random rather than planned. Siobhan applied for a pastoral post in the school she was working in to escape from a dominant head of department. Lesley also commented:

I don't think anything I have ever done is particularly planned.

It was clear they had had little choice even in their first teaching posts. Lesley, Debbie, Anita and Siobhan all began their teaching careers in schools in socially deprived areas where it was hard to recruit staff because of the high proportion of difficult pupils making the job demanding and tough. It was quite common in the 1960s and 1970s for local education authorities to recruit teachers and assign them to schools which had difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff. This was true in Debbie's and Siobhan's cases. Anita remembers:

I was the only applicant for the job and I soon realised why when I started teaching there. It was notorious for its badly-behaved students and poor results. It was one of the first schools to fail Ofsted inspection.

Siobhan said:

I started in an inner city school; it was not a wonderful school, it was badly run in terms of the needs of the youngsters. I felt the pupils were crying out for liberation, wanting opportunities but being denied them.

Teaching in these schools has had a profound effect on Lesley, Siobhan and Anita, and has resulted in them developing educational philosophies characterised by a strong desire to try to make a difference in the classroom. As Lesley typically explained:

I want to teach in schools where I was able to make a difference to the kids' lives. I suppose I believe that those kids that have all the advantages at home don't need me. I have continued to work in schools in socially deprived areas where the school can give them a boost and open up doors for them.

Teaching is regarded as a good career for women because it is claimed that it suits their caring and nurturing traits. Four of the women in my study have secured pastoral responsibilities to enhance their career into middle and senior management. Yet I have indicated in early chapters that this can be a disadvantage because the roles are not viewed as important for running a school. It is those posts that involve the organisation of curriculum or finances that are considered to be important when applying for headships. Fiona and Mary gained this experience as curriculum deputies. Nevertheless their career progression seems to differ little from the other women. In fact it has taken all

of them twenty years to reach their present leadership positions. With the exception of Siobhan, all have chosen to put their child-care responsibilities before seeking promotion. This either meant staying in one school for a considerable number of years or returning to teaching after a career break on a lower level responsibility than previously held.

4.5 A question of confidence

Confidence has been an issue for all six women, albeit to varying degrees. Some began to seek promotion once their children were no longer totally dependent upon them. They believed that this would give them more time to spend on their work and ensure they did a better job. Doing the job well gave them the confidence to take the next step, that of applying for senior positions in school. They have, as I have previously indicated, been supported by colleagues and partners who have also helped to boost their confidence. At the time of the interviews four of the six had been promoted to deputy headship and two had succeeded in obtaining headships in other areas. Two of the women are far from confident: Anita and Lesley demonstrate a gendered pattern of seeking approval for their actions and need the reassurance that they are doing a good job. Throughout the interviews they stressed this need for support, reassurance and approval. For example, Anita remembers that when she put a new pastoral policy together she felt:

I had not really got the support from the head and the staff did not want to take any of the ideas on board. I felt it was my fault it had failed.

Lesley also makes a similar point:

I worked for one head who would give you a job to do, with clear guidelines. I always felt I could not go back to him and say I am not really sure about what to do. I would have to go and seek help from someone else to make sure I was doing it right.

Furthermore, they firmly believe that their career progression had been enhanced by supportive partners. The help and support they received gave them the confidence to apply for promotion:

It was only when my husband said, 'You should be applying for deputy headships,' that I stopped and thought: he is right. He was a newly-qualified teacher when we met, ten years later he is a headteacher. He gave me the confidence to start to plan my career and to believe that I could do the job.
(Anita)

Lesley also spoke of the support she got from her husband, but adds another factor which helped boost her self-esteem:

It was only when I was getting feedback from colleagues that I was doing a good job that I decided to go for promotion. After all, I had not made a fool of myself, had not messed things up, so, yes, why not go for a deputy headship.

Debbie gives the appearance of being very confident but the more I came to probe the less confident she seemed to be. She has stayed in the same school for 15 years because she knew the systems and had established herself with colleagues, pupils and parents. She likes to be in a 'comfort zone' and throughout the interview talked about needing security, wanting to take risks but never quite being brave enough to do so:

My head will give me a job to do and will spend time talking me through it. I get a great buzz when he says, 'You have done a good job'.

I want to return to the issue of confidence a little later in this chapter, when I examine their leadership roles.

4.6 The significance of regional factors as a situated constraint

Two of the women referred to the geographical area, which we all work in, as a barrier to women seeking promotion to senior management positions:

My perception is that this town is a rather unusual place in this day and age. I believe there is the idea firmly rooted in the minds of people here is that blokes are blokes and girls are girls, what is more the blokes are heads and the girls aren't. You only have to go to the local head's meeting to realise what a very chauvinistic lot they are. Alongside the LEA representatives they all support

each other and seem to have little time for the women who attend. Let's face it there are few towns these days that have an all male club for professional men, that continue to exclude women.

(Debbie)

Surprisingly, all of the women had formed a similar impression of the selection panels they have faced when being interviewed, namely, an underlying assumption that headship was solely a male domain. These panels were invariably dominated by men:

I remember going for one job which had specifically mentioned a responsibility for girls' welfare, which gave me a clue that they were looking for a woman. Interestingly enough several men applied and were interviewed.

(Siobhan)

You can guarantee that whenever you go for an interview for a senior post the majority of candidates will be men. I often seem to be the token woman.

(Lesley)

Anita made some other interesting observations about the area. Previously she had worked both in Birmingham and the West Midlands and found what she describes the town in which she now works as a 'backwater'. Not only was the school leadership dominated by men but also the governing body and the LEA inspectorate:

I had met some really inspirational advisers and inspectors in Birmingham; what a shock when I met their opposite numbers here. I go along to meetings which are again dominated by men; women are either ignored or 'talked over' having their contributions dismissed out of hand.

Fiona made a further observation about the area being very traditional:

I have encountered the blue rinse brigade on selection panels; they see men doing the important jobs, fronting up, being leaders. They often seem to believe that women are incapable of leading a large school. Unfortunately, so often I was unable to convince them that they were wrong and I could do the job.

There was a general consensus among the six women that governing bodies in this area saw management as a male domain. Many governors gave the impression that it was men rather than women who were more likely to provide strong leadership required to run schools today. At this point I want to move on

to consider how the experiences described so far have influenced the type of leaders these women have become, and the discourses surrounding leadership that cut across their individual stories.

4.7 Being a leader

I want to begin with the discourse of rejection because two of the women talked with some pain about how it had affected them so deeply that they no longer wanted to pursue their desire to become headteachers. Even among successful women it seems to have restricted them to applying for certain posts and dismissing others for fear of further rejection, which they believe would have led to self doubt.

4.8 Fear of rejection

Lesley's pain showed through when she reflected on her own experiences:

Applying for jobs is a hard and emotionally demanding process. You put hours of work into the application form and letter. This is followed by the tension before the actual interview. You invest a lot of yourself in it. Rejection comes, never mind how hard you try to rationalise it, it is still rejection. Each time it happens you begin to question your ability and it knocks back your confidence. I seem to spend weeks after reflecting on what I should have done differently, sometimes trying to reinvent myself for the next interview. I try to decide what the governors on the selection panel are looking for but my own pre-conceptions creep in. I have a view that the governors will be middle class and conservative with a small c. Just the opposite of me; so I hold back, try to hide my true self.

Debbie, who on the surface is more confident, also found being rejected from a number of posts is putting her off applying for headship. She seems to have coped by getting angry:

In the last interview I got through to the last three and went on to the second day. The internal candidate in fact got the job. That was fine until I got the feedback. It was patronising, the chair of governors talked about being impressed with my enthusiasm especially as I was 52! I wanted to shout at him, what about my qualification, my ability to do the bloody job! Then after the anger has subsided you begin to question your ability. Am I really capable of doing this job? How much harder do I have to work to prove to these people that I can do the job?

This kind of reaction to being rejected for various jobs has led three of the women to consider the kind of schools they will apply for in the future.

Debbie, Lorraine and Anita have all indicated they will look to lead schools in difficult areas, possibly failing schools: schools in special measures. These, they feel, are the schools that many of their male colleagues would not be interested in: for these women it may be a route into headship:

I can now move further afield to find a job. It will probably be a school in special measures. I probably stand a chance of being successful, even getting the job. I need to feel I can do the job. I can be head of this school because I have the skills and qualifications.

(Anita)

I have done a lot of soul searching; I am my own hardest judge. A school in a socially deprived area may want someone like me, after all that's where I have gained my experience and expertise. I don't seem to have the confidence of the men that I have met on interview; they are less introspective and tell you, 'You can always learn how to do the job once you have got it.' It drains you so much I don't really know if I have the energy to carry on.

(Lesley)

Fiona, who has also successfully secured a headship, had to reassess her own plans. She decided after several interviews and rejections for headship in the secondary sector that she would be more successful if she applied for middle schools,

I realised they were not going to consider women seriously for headships in the large middle-class high schools in this district. You might be considered in the small high schools, especially schools in challenging circumstances but in my case I hadn't had much experience in, shall we say, difficult schools. I felt I was stuck in limbo so I made the decision to begin to apply to middle schools and I was successful.

4.9 Guilt discourse

Guilt is another powerful discourse identified by these women as leaders. This is connected to the time they have to devote to doing the job at the expense of their families, friends and partners, but also the extra hours required to prove

they can do the job as well as male colleagues might. It was also clear that in every case these women all felt that they had to work harder than their male counterparts in order to prove themselves and sustain recognition for doing the job well:

I don't have a life outside teaching Monday to Friday, I stay on at school until six or seven o'clock in the evening, this is even later when we have parents' and governors' meetings. It's not so bad now the kids are older. I still have pangs of guilt when I have sent them off to school when they have been feeling unwell, just so I didn't have to take time off. I also know I have spent less time helping my kids with their homework than I would expect from the parents of pupils in this school. On the positive side I feel I am much more sympathetic to female staff who need time out to take their kids to hospital or need to go home earlier than I do myself because of their family responsibilities.

(Fiona)

Siobhan, now in her second headship, has been faced with coping with her mother's failing health:

For most of my career I have left the responsibility for my ageing parents to my sister but she also needs a break. I can't do very much during term time but when the holidays come then I can offer more help. The downside is that I come back to school exhausted. This is so different from the other heads I meet who are able to rely on their wives to cope with such circumstances. I feel guilty if I don't help my sister and then feel guilty because I have neglected school work, it's a no win situation.

4.10 The importance of mentors as constraint and opportunity

Although all these women face constraints in developing careers, they were not entirely unsupported professionally. Even this support was not straightforward, and sometimes deeply gendered. For example, Siobhan and Fiona, the two headteachers, both put down their success to the fact that they had received support from their headteachers and mentors. In Siobhan's case she was given the opportunity to take charge of the curriculum, a job recognised by many selection panels as a prerequisite for headship. However, there was a 'sting in the tail' as far as her mentoring for headship was concerned. She feels that she had to prove herself before she was allowed to do this vital job:

I remember the head saying he wanted me to be examination officer. I think that was a test of whether I could do an administrative task and get it right. After a

year I remember he said, 'You don't need to be doing that any more: I know you can do it. We can now start to prepare you for headship.'

Fiona also had a supportive headteacher but always thought she came 'lower in the pecking order' than her two male deputy colleagues. They were given the more prestigious jobs in the school, dealing with the curriculum and financial issues. Her support came in the form of encouragement to do a master's degree and take a professional qualification specifically designed for headteachers. She says in hindsight:

I should have said, 'John, I must have some timetabling experience', but I didn't. I had a conversation with my daughter recently; she is a teacher. She is more pushy in her role than ever I was; she also has a definite career plan and is making sure she gets the right experiences for her C.V. Once she has gained enough experience she moves on.

Fiona had a better experience from a second mentor when she moved to work for a time at the LEA's training division. Her experience here was very different from the male-dominated cultures she had experienced in schools. She explains:

In school you have to be seen to fight your corner. Assertive, even aggressive attitudes, it seems to me, are valued in our secondary schools. In the LEA it was different: I worked with women who worked in a completely different way. My team leader had a very feminist management style.

She was brilliant and helped me build up a network of support. Believe it or not, but I am still going back to that group, touching base with them, checking things out, talking things through with them. They gave me the confidence to go out and get a headship on my own terms.

I will return to Fiona and the other women's leadership approaches later in this chapter.

4.11 Wanting and not wanting headship

I now want to turn to the ambiguity the women faced in wanting and not wanting headship. At first I was rather puzzled by the contradictory responses I got from some of the women. I, at first, mistakenly dismissed their attitudes

towards becoming leaders, or at least their failure to become leaders, as demonstrating a lack of ambition. In other words it was their own fault or their own unfettered choice. Unlike some of the heads in other studies these women did not want to be heads regardless of the cost (Colman, 2002; Hall, 1996). They have rejected or at least moved away from this construction of ambition. They lacked the ruthless determination that they would make it into headships. On further reading I began to realise that rather than lack of ambition, this may be a form of resistance and it is certainly socially shaped rather than simply an individual choice. They have a perception of what it is to be a head but are resisting this particular construction of leadership, and as a result they have nowhere to go. I think Lesley sums this up when she remarks:

The trouble is people have expectations of you as a head: that you will behave in certain ways, have certain answers and solutions, and of course you haven't. This may mean you have to act like a male head would. I have spent time mulling this over asking what I do and why I behave in certain ways. I have come to the conclusion I don't want to change. In order to be a head I need to toughen up, be prepared to be more assertive, even aggressive and ruthless, but that really is not what I want.

Anita and Debbie are also aware of this need for a masculine performance; they too show signs of ambiguity, wanting and not wanting headship. It is not an either or situation but appears to be more complex. Indeed their interviews contain contradictions as they move between constructing themselves as individuals and what they believe are the expectations of their colleagues and society at large. They move between their private and public identities. Debbie provides many examples of these constraints in her story:

I think as a head you have got to be ruthless, make unpopular decisions. You can explain to people your reasons for certain actions but then you have got to say, 'Sorry, I'm the head and this is the way I think we ought to go.' You then get on and do it.

This is in contrast with her statement she made a little later in the interview:

It's tough being a woman because you think things through differently. You are sensitive and concerned about other people's needs. Women are far more reflective and get very sort of concerned about whether they are doing things

properly or not. We, as women, are for ever questioning ourselves and our reasons for doing certain things.

Anita's story also contains contradictions as she initially said her goal was to move from being a deputy head to being a headteacher, but as our conversation developed she became more reflective:

I was so excited when I joined the senior management team. I thought I can be really creative here, do the things that give me a real buzz. They seem to want a risk taker; someone who would come along with new ideas. Now it has changed. I still feel like the new girl who is muddying the water. They are so anti change here. It's very strange even now if there is something new it is assumed by the staff it's my idea, it isn't always and it's my fault they are having to change. I have not really got support from the top. I worry that if I become a head and try to be me, then the governors will put the damper on it. People don't really want risk-takers looking after their schools.

Fiona thinks she has succeeded in adopting a leadership approach which she feels is true to herself and reflects her educational philosophy. She also believes that her own religious faith also impacts on the way she wants to lead and manage her school. The concept of servant-leader has made a deep impression on her. Grace (1995) has suggested that there is a link between moral authority and servant leadership in the way the head is primarily concerned with the service of others, recognising the core values of equity and care. It is a leadership style that seeks to provide a purpose for others by giving them a sense of direction. Fiona, more than any of the other women, has been influenced by feminism and feminist ideas. She was determined that once she had achieved her headship she would not follow other heads she had come across. She explained how she disliked the way some women adopt more masculine styles of leadership:

The three years working for the Quality Learning Service at the LEA provided me with a whole range of experiences which I wouldn't have elsewhere. I'm taking those experiences into my headship, namely working with successful women who are not afraid to work as women using their female characteristics and seeing them as strengths rather than trying to emulate men. Many of the female heads in this authority have disappointed me because they play the man's game, adopt their leadership styles. I hope I don't get like that because I don't think it does the girls behind us any good.

Her approach has its own risks and Fiona believed the governors were taking a chance when they appointed her because she was very open about her management style during her interview. As a headteacher she is very good at generating ideas and wanting to take staff with her by involving them in the decision process:

I have always worked collaboratively, making the primary concerns of what is best for the children, what is best for teachers and what is best for education. I have no room for confrontation or aggression in my management approach. I am there to serve the needs of the children and staff in the school.

I now wish to focus in more detail on these women's leadership performance to consider how they see and use their power in their current roles.

4.12 Leadership performance

I had come to recognise that all of these women revealed an ambiguity about wanting and not wanting headship. I began to probe to find if in some respects they were frightened or at least put off by the power they believed headteachers exercised:

I think there is a part of me that is frightened of power. It is a very lonely position being a head. The trouble is so many people have expectations of you when you are head. You are expected to behave in certain ways and have most of the answers. It's hard to be true to yourself in a headship position when traditionally it is seen as a man's role. This may mean you have to act like a man in order to at least succeed in getting the job. (Lesley)

Debbie, at first glance, seems to believe in a form of leadership that is associated with masculine ideas of power. For example, her terminology is somewhat masculine too, she often uses sporting and military metaphors when describing her preferred style. She claims:

I would lead from the front. I would expect the staff to follow my game plan.

Even so Debbie also rejects some of the macho leadership styles she has observed in male colleagues:

I would not want to be like one head I worked for. He was a big powerful bloke, often quite aggressive. He would claim to consult but you always knew he would do it his way. He was not averse to bullying people either. I don't think many women do things that way. They can be tough but you also need a sense of fairness.

Fiona is acutely aware of what she saw as the different management approaches commonly found between men and women:

As a woman I work very differently from the three male heads that I have worked under. I know it's not true of all women but I think women adopt a more consultative form of leadership. It is important to get every one on board and working with you. You have to be able to motivate staff.

Interestingly enough she also uses military metaphors when she describes male leaders:

Their style is much more cut-throat, independent, based on ego, you know the sort of thrusting leader who has the true vision and leads you forth into battle.

Both women recognised that their ideas reflected male/female stereotypes but nevertheless insisted that they had met people who acted in this way. They were also aware that some men adopted what they believed to be a more feminine style of leadership. However, it was Lesley who actually cited her present head as an example:

I think men are concerned about doing things on their own; it is important for them to be seen as capable and being independent. Whereas I don't think women mind sharing power, even giving it away; but having said that, not all men think in the same way. My present head will admit to his mistakes or having done something wrong. I think he is not afraid to show his feminine side.

Siobhan believes that it is part of the Catholic ethos to develop people's talents and to bring them on. She has adopted a collaborative management style and is prepared to:

...be collaborative and inclusive. My predecessor was incredibly directive, he didn't really allow anyone to develop and he would also shout at people if they didn't do exactly what he wanted. I make myself available, people, staff and pupils have the opportunity to come and discuss anything with me. Now people are coming to me and saying, 'I would like to develop such and such, what do you think?' and I'd say, 'What do you want to do, this, this and this and they'd

say, 'Well we think we'll do that,' and I'd say, 'Go for it and run with that,' and they'd go off skipping and do a good job.

All of these women have thought deeply about the type of leaders they want and hope to be. They have adopted styles that reflect their own identities and experiences. They also suspect that they have elements they have seen in other headteachers that have been adapted to their own leadership approaches; other characteristics, as I have shown have been rejected. Each of them is adamant that it is important they are 'true' to themselves in order to live out their educational and leadership values.

4.13 Reflection and reflexivity

All of the women in this survey thought that they frequently reflected upon the way power was used by them and others in the school:

I think most women I have worked with and for tend to be quite sensitive underneath; they are concerned about other peoples' needs. I don't think men worry and spend as much time going over and questioning what they have done or consider for long if a decision was the right one.

(Debbie)

The idea of questioning and examining their actions and ideas was common in all the women I interviewed. It often also related to their feelings surrounding their ability to do the job. All of them knew and believed that they had to be very competent in the job they were doing before they could move on. This was in contrast to the way they saw their male colleagues. They had the perception that men were willing to take on jobs without any experience or expertise. They were far more likely to take risks, make mistakes and learn on the job:

I need to feel I can do the job. I need to know I can be head of a school because I have developed all the necessary skills and qualities required for leadership.

(Lesley)

The other women also felt the need to reflect on their skills and ability, doubts here was one reason they had delayed applying for promotion. A lot of soul searching was done by all of the women I interviewed. This does not stop at

the interview stage but continues even when they have been successful and achieved headship. Siobhan says she is always reflecting on what she has done. She also finds herself rehearsing various situations and scenarios before she actually takes action:

I often rehearse what I am going to say in a staff meeting or governors' meeting. I try to anticipate problems and reactions and to ensure that I at least sound confident and know what I am doing. I don't know if male colleagues do this: I have never yet met one who has admitted to it. I'm very reflective and self-critical; it drives my male deputy mad because he feels that I should be more spontaneous.

Without exception the women in this study spend time mulling over their actions, and the reasons behind their actions and decisions. They worry about the decisions they make, finding it difficult not to leave these worries behind in the workplace but find them impinging on their personal lives:

We are into a bidding culture where you have to market the school. You also have to deal with some pretty aggressive people. You go home at night and worry about it. I think we are more prone to this than our male colleagues.
(Mary)

I now wish to turn to what these women actually do in their schools and how they use the power they have.

4.14 Working in schools

I was surprised that the women were rather reticent when it came to talking about the power they exercised in their schools. Lesley once more provides a typical response, which could have been made by several of the women, that suggests they are rather ambivalent about the power they have:

I look after the curriculum and am also responsible for the teaching and learning within the school. I have, I suppose, been given the authority to make decisions but that doesn't mean I wield power over people. I just don't work like that. If we have an issue over, say for instance, someone's style of teaching: it may not be up to standard and so I set about working with them to bring about an improvement.

Lesley, like the other women, seems to exercise power 'with' rather than power 'over' the people they work alongside. They also are able to use their power to provide help, support and resources to improve teaching, learning or school environment:

People may see power in being able to control the budget. They will come to me for extra money to buy either books or equipment or to introduce a new initiative. If the money is available I will find it, so where is the power in that?

(Lesley)

I am responsible for staff personnel matters; a member of staff will come to me if they want time off or need to miss meetings. I have the power to make that decision, but it is not earth-shattering is it? I am much more concerned about the decision I should be making over the key stage three teaching and learning strategy. The ultimate decision doesn't lie with me but the headteacher and he does not always back me; so I think this undermines my own power and authority over others.

(Anita)

I have the responsibility for administering the professional development and training budget, but I don't really have any real power. My decisions are based on our school improvement plan and issues relating to staff's performance management. I make decisions after consultation and in line with our agreed priorities.

(Debbie)

Some of the women found it difficult to use their power in an assertive way. They agonised over situations where they had tried to take people along with them, expected them to deliver on a certain task only to find their wishes or requests had been ignored:

In my first term there it was a real shock that deadlines meant nothing to some staff; they simply ignored them. I have now learned that I must put mechanisms in place to make sure people meet deadlines and are accountable. I found that some people actually need directives; they don't actually like working collaboratively.

(Anita)

Anita also found that sometimes it was not easy to get people involved in power sharing:

At one of my first pastoral meetings I said, 'I don't want to be the only person controlling these meetings, I want to know what issues are important to you, so will you please give me your agenda items for these meetings.' For over a year

nothing was done, no one else put anything on the agenda. So I tried a different tack; I abandoned the agenda and I produced a pro-forma and we would also spend the first five minutes of every meeting writing down issues for discussion. It worked well.

These women see their influence in school as one of empowering others, rather than having power over others. They want to influence people in order to bring about change and improvement within their schools. They all felt more comfortable when they were sharing power rather than exercising control over others. Even though they were uncomfortable with the idea that at times coercion was necessary, they recognised that it was an inevitable part of their management responsibilities. However, in each case these women agonised over incidents when they had had to be coercive and often tried to think of other ways of achieving the desired results. Finally they were adamant that they would never use the bullying tactics that they had seen some male colleagues use:

I remember speaking to the curriculum deputy over a time tabling issue. I was shocked when he said, 'Being the timetabler means you are in a position of power; I'm in a very powerful position.' I asked him what he meant by this remark. He said, 'I can make or break people by giving them terrible groups. I can over-allocate them so they do not get any preparation time. I can even allocate classes which are outside their subject areas.' I would never do that.

(Mary)

These women are constantly aware that as leaders they are expected to perform in certain ways and this often conflicts with the way they, as individuals, wish to lead.

4.15 Revisiting confidence

Confidence for the women in my study is a crucial factor in leadership performance. It became obvious that women struggle to gain confidence on their way to a leadership position. Throughout the telling of these stories I became aware that these women routinely reflected upon their work and examined and measured their performance against what was perceived to be a 'competent leader'. The degrees of insecurity or lack of confidence varied at

different times in their careers and was common and felt most strongly when they began to consider applying for promoted posts. This sense of insecurity also occurred in the day-to-day work. In Fiona's case she wondered if her experiences as the token women in a senior leadership team had had a marked effect on her attitude and confidence:

So often I felt excluded in our weekly meetings while they (male colleagues) chatted on about the various rugby and football matches they had watched over the weekend. In these meetings we were trying to sort something out, tease a problem out or begin to establish a new policy. There would be times when I would say things and it was as if I had not said them. I sometimes wondered why I bothered to speak. These were not awful men, just ordinary reasonable guys. It's that male culture; six of them, one of me. It wasn't that I was saying inane things it was just that my voice didn't carry the same weight.

When eventually another woman was appointed to the team she found things changed. Although the relationship with male colleagues did not get any better, they could support each other and begin to recognise that their ideas were useful and worthwhile.

Other women in the study often feel the need to seek reassurance from colleagues when carrying out a particular task. Anita recounts how she experienced being let down when the senior management team failed to support her attempts to introduce a new reading scheme for pupils with special educational needs:

We were ready to start the programme and a parent phoned the head and said he didn't want his son involved in the scheme. We had sent letters home explaining the rationale behind the project hoping to enlist parents' support. Instead of trying to convince the parents of the merits and benefits of this work the head just came along and said, 'Take this boy out, his parent says he's fine at reading and doesn't want him involved.' This isn't the first time this has happened, and you begin to question your own ability. Could I have done anything more to make sure the thing worked?

I have referred to other issues concerning a lack of self-confidence in an earlier section of this chapter and began to speculate if it had any connection with age or generation issues. I found there was a consensus amongst the women that some of their experiences at school left them less confident than boys. Even

Mary and Siobhan, who were very bright at school, felt that they had little encouragement from their teachers to have ambitious career plans:

The boys in our grammar school were groomed for Oxbridge; I cannot actually remember anyone talking to me about career guidance.

(Mary)

Fiona believed her daughter had higher expectations and more ambition than she ever had. She explains that this may be because he has been more ambitious for her daughter than her mother was for her. However, when I interviewed two younger middle managers, who are in their early thirties, I found little difference from the older women. I shall return to this in more detail in the next chapter when I focus on these two younger women.

4.16 The relationship between biography and identity

Four of the six women in this study have tried to secure headship and so far have been unsuccessful. I wondered, therefore, if these women's biographies gave a hint to the reasons for this phenomenon, and what the relationship was between their biographies and their identities. From the outset it was clear that, as girls, they all (even the two successful heads) had sought approval from their parents and teachers. This desire for approval had also permeated their professional lives as teachers, and having gained approval they had grown in confidence. Furthermore, it became apparent that the desire to move on from the identity of teacher to that of leader brought again a strong need for approval from partners and colleagues. Thus this professional confidence was fragile, and had to be made and re-made in new contexts and roles.

Teaching has long been recognised as a suitable occupation for women, but for too long the role of headteacher has been seen as the province of men. It has been a struggle for all of the women in this study to reach their present positions. They were all acutely aware of their own performance as middle managers, only moving to the next step when they were convinced of not only their ability to do their present jobs well but having also acquired the skills

required for leadership. In addition, they all had a clear perception of the type of leaders they hoped to become. All of these women had thought long and hard before applying for headship, and invested a great deal of time and effort into putting together an application and preparing for their interviews. This is arguably a deeply gendered pattern in that women first need to feel they could do the job before they apply for headships. They were profoundly affected by the rejection they all, at some time, had experienced. This had led to long periods of reflection and self-criticism and to an initial loss of confidence. The ability to 'pick oneself up' varied, but both Siobhan and Fiona seem to have been more successful than the others. Interestingly enough, both of these women have strong religious faith which they believe helps them through difficult circumstances.

Moreover, I am arguing that these women's leadership identities are embedded in their life histories and not confined to their professional life history. I am making this claim because I believe the data has clearly shown that their desire to secure leadership came only when other aspects of their lives permitted it. For example only when their children had begun to be less dependent were five of these six women able to seek out such positions. They are also supported and encouraged by their partners who often led them to a recognition of their professional abilities. At the same time these women were only too aware of the social influences that often conflict with their personal experience, namely that they are expected to be the main child carers. Society still sees this as their prime responsibility.

Ironically, those women who do begin to put their careers before their family responsibilities are the subject of criticism. Debbie voices her disapproval of the ambition exhibited by some of her younger colleagues:

We have some very ambitious heads of department. They put their children in nursery before eight o'clock in the morning and don't pick them up until six in the evening. They want to be heads and have carefully planned their careers. I said to one, 'Wouldn't you rather be at home with yours kids than spend several

hours in senior management meetings?' She said, 'No, I want to be a head and I therefore need to spend time in meetings.' They are all very ambitious and no doubt they will make it but at a cost to their family life.

Feelings of disapproval and guilt about leaving children in other people's care have been one of the major constraints on some women's careers. They experience conflict between their identity as mother with their identity as leader. They are torn between needing to spend time in school because their position demands that commitment, and the pressure to be at home fulfilling the traditional role of wife and mother. The governments of the 1980s and 1990s emphasised the role of the family and reinforced the idea of 'the mother at home' as a concept to be accepted and admired. It was also clear that part of their socialisation as girls had been learning to please others. This idea of home-maker can also be found in the women's early lives. Lesley explains:

We were brought up to judge ourselves against others. I also think we often consider if we have hurt someone's feelings, have we been fair to others as we could have been. Certainly that has been part of my cultural training as a girl. I think women of our age were brought up that way. It is important for women and girls to treat people well whereas I think for boys and men it is more important to win. There is pressure to be homemakers.

This contrasts with the way men are socialised to be independent and career-orientated (Davidson and Cooper 1992). Women are encouraged, by their role within the family, to be dependent and nurturing; traits which are not always valued in leadership positions. Nevertheless, Fiona and Siobhan have brought these qualities into leadership of their schools. They have shown it is possible in a leadership position to adopt a style which is about equity, participation and valuing others. Lesley felt she wanted to lead in this way but questioned whether that leadership would be accepted by selection panels she encountered. She thought that she would have to change, and feared the isolation that she believed would come with headship. However, Fiona and Siobhan have shown it is possible to share, and have delegated their power and authority. They have established strong leadership teams and have benefited from the support and camaraderie that the members of the team provide:

I have a great working relationship with my two deputies. We trust each other and are open about our problems and difficulties because we have confidence in each other. I think it is because I always try to negotiate with them, rather than telling them to do this or that particular job. I have also let them know how much I appreciate them as colleagues and always try to publicly recognise their efforts with lots of praise.

(Siobhan).

This is in contrast to other women in leadership positions who have felt the need to develop more masculine ways in this role in order to be recognised as authentic leaders. Reay and Ball (2000) have argued that some women heads are just as controlling when managing their schools as their male colleagues, particularly when organising and directing others. Fiona and Siobhan's feminist approach to leadership is, therefore, not without risks. Women who assume a feminist leadership style can be marginalised or positioned as 'the other' because effective leadership is so often seen in terms of being 'in control' or 'in charge' (Blackmore 1999). These women are challenging dominant masculinities and modes of management by adopting a different style. Women, like Fiona, who want to push women's issues at work could be seen to disrupt the established order by seeking to achieve gender equality and justice.

4.17 Diversity versus commonality

I have previously discussed the ambiguity of women wanting and not wanting headship. These women want to respond to the demands of leadership and to fit into what they see as the contemporary perception of leadership but on their own terms. This is where a contradiction occurs because they do not want to have to fit into a pre-conceived masculine mould as they want to be pro-active and creative, adopting their own approach to leadership. Siobhan, Fiona, Lesley and Anita all talked about women's different ways of being a leader but were unsure of how they would be able to get others to recognise the advantages of doing so by appointing them to headships. Noddings (1992), for example, has made a plea for nurturing and caring to form a basis of teaching and school management. However, I do not think this is the answer to the problem of

women's under-representation in leadership. It is in danger of essentialising women. Confining women to this particular style of leadership has been critiqued by Blackmore (1999). My data revealed women had individualistic styles of leadership and to view them all as caring and collaborative is an oversimplification. In fact what they did have in common was their desire to make a difference for both pupils and teaching staff. Lesley spoke with enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment her leadership has brought to the school:

I'm proud we have become a learning school and the major part I have played in it. We have taken on the philosophy of how children learn. I have supported the staff by organising training days and events which not only provides them with the necessary strategies but also means that the idea of a learning culture has become embedded into the school culture. I love it and I am delighted it has happened – I wish I were better at it.

Lesley is modest about her achievement despite the fact she has made a tremendous contribution to bringing about change in the school. The recent Ofsted inspection report compliments the school on the significant improvement made to the quality of both teaching and learning across the curriculum as a result of this initiative. However, Lesley still believes she needs to keep on improving, that is she is never quite good enough to seek a headship position. This may be true of other women and could be one reason why women are reluctant to apply for headships. They are self questioning about their actions and beliefs in the classroom. Munro (1998) also reflects on this point,

Images of women teachers as change agents, as actively pursuing and enacting their own philosophies or beliefs about teaching, are rare. The ideological roots of teaching as women's true profession, based on their nurturing capacities, continues to constrict the image of teachers to one of primarily caretakers in which one's own needs are subsumed to those of the students. Traditional wisdom has it that it is a women's duty to carry out the ideas of educational thinkers, not to be constructors of ideas.

(Munro 1998: 82)

Two of the women in this study believed they had to adopt a more masculine form of leadership in order to at least gain the position of headteacher.

Margaret Thatcher was quoted by both as a possible example of a woman who epitomised a masculine approach to leadership.

Yet the point that came across from these interviews was that there are many ways of leading, and women are not a homogeneous group; some will want to be creative in their approaches, while others will adopt a more masculine style. My perception is that Debbie falls into the latter category. She often uses military metaphors when describing the type of headteacher she hopes to be. She does not really believe in collaboration and recognises that confrontation would also form an important part of her leadership style should she become a head. Throughout her interview she talked with admiration about strong women leaders she had worked for, and was critical of her present head because of the time he wasted, talking to staff and seeking their views and enlisting their support for policy changes. She expressed her irritation:

He tries to be all things to all people, he wants to be seen as a nice guy. There are hard decisions to be taken, particularly over the present rate of spending, he's got to take them and because they are difficult he will not take them.

She speaks with admiration of the directive leadership of a female head she recently met on a training course who said:

'At my school, staff know that they have to hit the criteria that I give them.' One of the delegates asked, 'Does that make it difficult?' and she replied, 'Behind my desk I've got a poster, it reads, 'If you can't change the people, change the people.' She may be ruthless but her school is improving.

Debbie maintained she would be prepared to make people feel uncomfortable if they were not prepared to 'pull their weight' and would take competency procedures rather than try and support them. Fiona provided a complete contrast. She described in detail the time and effort she had put into supporting one of her teachers. She had worked alongside this colleague in the classroom and provided both mentoring and coaching facilities in order to bring about change and improvement. It became clear that different women construct themselves as agents in control of their professional lives as a result of their individual biographies. They are influenced by their experiences in school and by the expectations of them from others, that includes members of their own

families, their colleagues and society at large. At this point I want to turn again to the importance of the concept of gender.

4.18 Theorising gender

It is only over the last ten or so years that gender has been seen as an important concept when theorising leadership (Blackmore 1999; Coleman 2003; Hall 1996). The identification of leadership and management largely as a male prerogative has led to an assumption in our society that the position of headteacher should be predominately held by men. This, I believe, shapes the way women and men perceive leadership and the way they identify themselves as leaders. It does not seem to matter how much we try to move away from stereotypes: they still hold sway with many people, especially, with school governors and selection panels. This is evident because, despite the fact that women in the teaching profession make up the majority of the work force, at 55.7%, (DfES 2004), men are seen as the natural leaders and women are still viewed as having the major responsibility for home and family. The result in the geographical area for this study at the time of writing (2006) has been that no woman has been appointed as a head. In addition four of the women have not only suffered rejection in the appointment process, but have had their leadership contested once they were in the post. Anita's experiences, as I have shown earlier in this chapter, provide evidence of this attitude prevailing in schools. Such experiences have impacted on the way these women want to present themselves. In Debbie's case it was controlling; Mary was not particularly concerned about gender equity; Anita and Lesley believed you would need to adopt men's leadership traits if you were to achieve a headship position, although they both decided to reject it, even if it meant they failed to secure a headship.

Some women in leadership positions mask their gender and sexuality by the way they dress, talk and walk. I found this to be evident in Debbie's case not only when she refers to herself but also when describing her younger ambitious

colleagues. She found it necessary to power dress and referred to younger colleagues as the 'blondes in trouser suits'. It reveals much about how some women want to present themselves and their view of power by relating it to their femininity. Debbie firmly believed clothing sent out messages about power and status. She is quite dismissive of a fellow interviewee she met on a job interview:

You would think for an important job interview people would look the part. This one woman wore this awful summer frock. I remember the woman who got the job; she looked fantastic in a smart pale green suit. She looked and acted the part.

Our constant needs to perform and project ourselves in ways that are acceptable to others exist, I believe, because patriarchy is still a dominant feature in our society. Connell also makes this point,

The decade of the 1990s is not producing a unified movement of men opposing patriarchy, anymore than previous decades did.

(Connell 1995: 242)

4.19 The impact of patriarchal practices

Patriarchal discourse seems as strong as ever. It came through when the women talked about their careers: for example, the pressures to leave school once they became pregnant rather than take maternity leave. Child-care responsibilities also meant that career progression was put on hold for ten or more years, in the case of four of these six women. The power and authority that they had exercised in the home was not recognised when they came to apply for promoted posts; in one case it was seen as a distinct disadvantage:

I was thirty nine before I began to apply for middle management posts. Even that wasn't easy. At the interview I was asked how I would balance the job with my family responsibilities. No one seemed to recognise the management skills you exercise as a wife and a mother.

(Fiona)

There were many other examples of these women experiencing patriarchal practices within their schools. A common feature was the way they were treated in meetings. This ranged from their voices being ignored through to having their ideas dismissed, only to find these ideas emerging at a later date and a male colleague claiming credit for them. Some of the women also referred to the patronising way they were treated, even by junior male colleagues. Their comments on their experiences of sexist and infantilising discourses certainly resonated with me. The casual way these women were addressed as 'love', 'dear', 'girl', only serves to reinforce the superiority of men over them. Fiona also recalls her irritation when her local authority inspector asked if she knew where he could find the headteacher. It is perhaps not surprising that while these attitudes continue to exist, women continue to be passed over when applying for headships.

I could not help but admire the way these women, particularly in the case of Fiona and Siobhan, faced these negative experiences and got on with the jobs they had to do. They continued to seek a headship, and had decided that if successful they would do things differently in their own schools. They have shown that power does not only rest with men; they have refused to be the passive participants of male power. Even in those cases where the women in this study have decided they no longer want to pursue headship, it is a conscious decision to reject headship, their resistance based on not wanting the job because the perceived style of leadership required is not what they want. I believe it also represents a tragic loss to our schools, in terms of different leadership styles and approaches. In addition, their influences and impact as forces for change will be limited, as they will never have leadership power; these women have all wanted to become headteachers in order to make a difference to the quality of teaching and learning.

In the next chapter I intend to focus on the experiences of the two younger women in my study in order to discover if there have been any significant changes as a result of age and a new generation of female leaders.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

The second part of my analysis is set against a background of five people in one large school. I chose this school as a site because it provided an opportunity to interview two younger, aspiring women leaders. I wanted to find out if their careers were different from those of the other women in my study. This would add an age dimension to the study. Furthermore, it would provide an opportunity to study the way gender is constructed relationally, by focusing on different working relationships in order to illuminate how gender is constructed either to enable or disable women in performing gender. In addition I wanted to examine the headteacher's and the chair of governor's attitudes to women to establish what had influenced their views on gender equality within the school. By concentrating on one school, I believed, I might gain some insight into the micro-interactions that produce and reproduce gender relationships, relationally in both relationships between women but also between women.

5.1. Choice of the research site

This research site offered an advantage to a part-time researcher as it was readily accessible. I also had a professional connection with this school based on a collaborative teaching programme, which gave me a good knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of the head and senior management team. This school is also unusual because it has a high proportion of female middle managers when compared to the other secondary high schools in the town. The two women I interviewed, Jill and Sarah, had recently been promoted from middle management to assistant head's posts. The headteacher, Peter Webster and the chair of governors, Ann Gallie, were also willing to allow me to spend time interviewing them and three additional members of staff. I wanted to interview Peter since I needed to listen to the views of a male headteacher in this area. I hoped that it would lead to further insights into gender as relational

and to explain the under-representation of women in this particular town. I wanted to find out particularly if opportunities were changing for a younger generation of women, and if their experiences were significantly different from the six older women I had interviewed.

5.2. Profiles of the participants

Once again, I think it is important to produce a pen portrait of the five people involved in the interviews. These descriptions, I hope, will enable the reader to capture particular moments and experiences in these stories and possibly understand better the particular turning points in the women's careers.

Peter Webster: the school head (20/11/2004)

Peter is in his late 40s: a pleasant, confident and affable man who likes to talk at length. Most of the interview, unlike the women in this study, was taken up with discussing his professional life. He only talked briefly about his personal life, even though I asked him directly whether he thought either his present family or his own family background had any bearing on his career progression. Peter said that he was from a working class background and was married with school-aged children:

I like to keep home and school separate. I think we should focus on my career moves. These stepping stones in my career have been a very significant part of my life.

He explained that the significant points in his life were his career moves. He had studied at an elite university and began teaching in the North of England in a very large prestigious comprehensive school. He moved from this school after several years to become head of department in a school within the area. He moved again after four years to become a deputy head and secured his first headship five years later. Peter's career trajectory was planned and apparently smooth. He moved onwards and upwards at regular predetermined intervals. He feels that he has worked for some inspirational headteachers who were

excellent role models. Throughout the interview Peter seemed very confident in telling his professional story of an impressive upwards trajectory. As he told it, his working class background had not presented him with any professional obstacles.

Ann Gallie: the school governor (26/01/2005)

Ann is in her 50s, married with a family. She retired early from teaching and devotes most of her time now to local politics. She has a long connection with the school: her children attended the school and she has been a governor for 10 years and became chair of governors five years ago. She was elected because of her obvious commitment to the school and because she was prepared to devote her time to the job. She is extremely interested in the school and meets weekly for a working lunch with the head. Ann described herself in these terms:

I think I was a loser because I failed my 11+. I really had to struggle to get on in my school. I wanted to be a teacher and through determination and ambition I got into training college. It's influenced how I see things. I want to make sure this school continues to improve and I do have an equal opportunities agenda.

Sarah Roberts: head of department (16/03/2005)

Sarah is in her early 30s, married with young twins. Her father works in a skilled trade and her mother is a home-maker; she says her father has been very supportive and ambitious for his daughter. She is quietly spoken and on the surface seemed confident, and she appeared to have her career clearly mapped out. She had taken maternity leave and returned to work within months of the birth of her children. She is married to a professional man, who has been very supportive. She says that she did not intend to have more than one child and her twins have been extremely hard work:

We were only ever going to have one child, but we had twins! This has made it very difficult for me, especially when my partner is away on business. When he is at home it is a team effort; he cooks and helps with the children. We are

constantly juggling the child care. I wonder, sometimes, how that is perceived by my colleagues.

Her teaching began after she finished university; originally, she wanted to remain at university and do research. However, she changed her mind after failing to get a first-class degree. She stayed for four years in her first teaching post and moved to her present school to take up a head of department's job five years ago. She has just successfully applied for and obtained an assistant head's post within the area. Sarah's husband shares many of the household chores and he looks after the twins in the evening to allow her to do her school work.

Jill Moore: recently appointed assistant head (21/02/2005)

Jill is in her middle thirties, married and had returned to school in the previous month, having taken maternity leave. She and her partner have decided that he will give up his job to provide the child care for their young son. Jill stated:

My job is not just a job: my job is something I love and I'm very passionate about it.

She and her husband also enjoy mountaineering and walking. She spent two years in Scotland as a child and describes the enjoyment she and her parents had gained from climbing and sailing. After studying English at university she obtained her first teaching post in Wales. She says she had a 'fantastic' mentor in that school who gave her the confidence and help she needed to make this job enjoyable. Jill's second teaching post was in Manchester. She was promoted after one year and stayed on for a further three years before coming to her present school as second in the English department. She secured a head of department post two years later and has recently been promoted again to become an assistant head in the senior management team. An assistant head's post carries similar responsibilities to that of a deputy headteacher, with one exception. The post holder is not required to deputise for the headteacher in a case of absence. She intends to stay on for two years before applying for a deputy headship in another school. She says that she and her partner are not

ties to this area, widening the scope and opportunity for her to gain promotion. She also has the ambition to be a headteacher but is still reticent about the means by which she wants to gain a headship:

I haven't really got my future career plans firmly mapped out because that would mean that if I had it mapped out, then if I couldn't get there, then that would be a huge disappointment; I prefer to just take it one step at a time. Let's see how I get on as a deputy head.

5.3 Gender and generation

I want at this point to focus on age as a dimension within this study. There is a commonly held view that younger women may be more ambitious than more mature women, as they have grown up at a time when opportunities for women have expanded and are now arguably taken for granted (Coleman 2003; White et al., 1992). The two younger women in this study have reached senior management level while still in their early thirties. They both have possibly another 30 years ahead of them in the profession, ample time to fulfil their leadership aspirations. This contrasts with women of my generation who reached middle management positions at a later stage, their late 30s and early 40s. Other studies show, for example, Russell (1995), that while younger women are reaching middle-management positions at an earlier age they are still not obtaining headships. I wondered if it would be different for Sarah and Jill. Would they succeed in becoming headteachers? Peter saw them as ambitious and competitive women yet did not refer to them as potential headteachers, even while he saw them taking lesser leadership roles in his school. There was not enough preparation for headships taking place; he did not, I thought, seem prepared to give them a role that would extend their status within the school or arguably aware of what he might do to ensure their exposure to the full range of headship roles and tasks. At times he showed a somewhat paternalistic attitude, which came across as condescending to both Jill and Sarah. It may be that this was not his intention and that he was genuinely working to enable their development. One could argue too, that as a male headteacher, he too was

caught up in gendered webs of which he would be partially rather than fully aware. Despite his good intentions, there were gendered limits to what he was able to do to support women into leadership. Consequently that he reproduced normalizing gender relations, even as he opened some space for gender change. Normalizing was arguably promoted because he did seem to encourage competition between them, no doubt believing this to be in their best interests. It may be that Peter's competitive stance is a result of the current emphasis on managerialism in schools. Blackmore, (1999) argues that this poses difficulties for women as they struggle to decide whether to conform or resist forms of masculinity required by present managerial roles. It is not surprising that in this climate Peter finds it necessary to encourage masculine styles of management.

I have encouraged these young women to work together, they are all at the same stage in their careers and they can feed off each other and have some healthy competition. I had some outstanding results from them in terms of the quality of improvement in teaching and learning. This has led to better examination results. They are very good for this school.

Jill, and to a lesser extent Sarah, accept his paternalism towards them because they hope to use it to their advantage in building their careers. They are not prepared to challenge his attitude towards them because this would pose a threat to him and possibly hinder their future career prospects. Moreover, Peter is keen for them to achieve in his school and is willing to promote them internally rather than to encourage them to look outside the school for promotion. He has promoted Jill from a middle management post to the next step above, namely an assistant head's post.

Ann, like Peter, believes these women should be given more appropriate tasks to prepare them for leadership:

We have some excellent young female middle managers. They are competitive and know what they want and where they want to be. They won't stay here like some of our generation; they will move on first into deputy headship and then into headship. It is our job to encourage them to do a good job and then move on. We have some good women here but they have stayed here too long, one woman has been here over eighteen years. They have only experienced the

'softer' side of management, involved with pastoral and personnel issues. They have had no experience of curriculum or financial planning. In contrast the younger women are pushing against that glass ceiling. They are ambitious and we should give them opportunities here, but not be afraid to let them go on to promoted posts.

Ann believes that Sarah and Jill need to experience the more competitive 'hard' skills involved in management. Ann, in her terms, is helping them to prepare for senior management albeit this is a masculine view of management. Consequently, Sarah and Jill find the support from some of their colleagues to be more useful than that given, at times, by Peter and Ann:

I have a tremendous network of people here, there are twenty female heads of department. I socialise with the head of English, the head of humanities and the head of foreign languages. It is great because I can sound things out with them, bounce ideas off each other. It helps boost your confidence when you come to deliver your ideas to the head, colleagues and the governors. (Sarah)

She implied that the chair of governors may talk about supporting the young heads of department, but in reality there was little action beyond words and rhetoric. However it is worth noting that Sarah, was experiencing rejection having failed to gain an assistant head's post within the school, applied elsewhere. She acknowledges the opportunities Peter has given her but she is careful about how much advice she was prepared to seek from him. She exemplifies the way we perform gender; Sarah feels the need always to be seen as competent. The head is powerful and she does not want him to see her vulnerability. She found it much more useful to test out her ideas amongst her close colleagues and their reactions before revealing her ideas in an open forum. However, Sarah was not necessarily adopting a feminine collaborative approach but perhaps using other women to gauge reaction to her ideas before making them public. I wondered if this approach, on Sarah's part, had been made more acute as a result of the competitive atmosphere within the school, that Peter had so vigorously encouraged. For example, at the beginning of every school year each department's examination results are posted in the form of league tables with each department head being actively encouraged to produce better results year on year. This is understandable at a time when headteachers are held

accountable for the examination results within the school and the wider community as represented in the published performance tables. It is not surprising that in this atmosphere that Sarah needs to be sure of her ground before she makes her position clear. This leads me to conclude that, because the funnel is so narrow for women to squeeze through into leadership, people like Sarah must engage in practices of rivalry, often taking the ideas of others and putting them forward as their own, not unlike their male colleagues.

Jill also finds the network of support within the school useful in her professional role but does not want to socialise in the same way as Sarah now that she is part of the senior management team. Griffiths (1995) writes that there is:

.....a requirement on a person to adjust her actions and reaction in order to be acceptable to a group.

(Griffiths: 1995: 117)

She has become more selective in her choice of friends, preferring to socialise with people who do not work in the school, thus keeping her home and work life separate. She may feel the need to establish a 'distance' between herself and her former head of department colleagues in order to create a different relationship with them. Nevertheless, professionally, she continues to offer support to them and recognises the tremendous contribution and help they gave her prior to her promotion:

I find them all very talented and I think others in the school see them as a powerful and successful group. Janet is very well organised, Sarah is a superb leader; Mary has been successful in her department too. I think we are all seen as ambitious by colleagues. The others tend to go off to the pub sometimes, much as some of the men do. They are seen as the new young girls' club. We are competitive for our departments; we are all striving to out do each other as far as the results are concerned. We talk about different strategies for improvement and I find this sharing of ideas extremely useful. I have now moved away from the group because I've been promoted to an assistant head's position. I am very different out of school and I want to keep my private and professional lives separate.

Nevertheless, this mutual support is very useful because it appears to give these women the confidence which the older women in this study so often lack. They talk about their successes and discuss difficulties and offer each other practical support and ideas, albeit within a context of competition. It would appear there are competing discourses of support and competition, each of which will be more or less dominant at particular times, and each of which fuels their leadership ambitions in different ways. Their stories illustrate that these two women, at times, show gender solidarity, at other times gender competition. For example, Jill has taken this supportive stance into her new role as assistant head and, as a line manager, is supporting others below her. She was instrumental in suggesting a talented head of department should continue in that role after returning from maternity leave and changing from a full time to a part-time post:

I encouraged Lucy to consider keeping her head of department responsibilities, even though she was now working only three days a week. She can do it as well as others can in five days. I know some people didn't agree and thought it was a dangerous precedent to set, but why should successful women have to go back to main scale jobs and lose their management responsibilities and allowances because they have a family. Their talent does not evaporate because they have become mothers.

Interestingly enough, in the interview with the head he claimed that this was his idea, and described how it was his flexible approach which was developing these young women's careers. Jill did not know he was claiming this initiative for himself but it would not have bothered her, even if this had been revealed, as she believed he was entitled to do this because she acknowledged him as someone she has to defer to. I shall return to this theme of micro-interactions at a later stage in the chapter to show how they produce and reproduce gendered relations.

Like the older women I interviewed, Sarah and Jill still seem to need to seek approval from the headteacher. They both said at times that they lacked confidence but did not allow their colleagues to see it:

I try to show that I am in charge but not in an overbearing way.
We don't have – perhaps this is the wrong word- the arrogance that many of our male colleagues possess. They have a self belief that I have to admire.

(Sarah)

Yet, ironically, they are prepared to reveal themselves to the head, in Sarah's case once she has tested her ideas on her colleagues. Jill also said that she had to go and talk to Peter when she returned from her maternity leave. She wanted to know how she could handle the people who had taken over her job while she was away:

I was nervous. I wondered if they had done a better job than me. I wanted reassurance from the head that I was OK. I needed that confidence. It was absurd really because leadership should be about finding people who may be better than you but utilising their talents for the good of the school.

Again we see contradictions occurring in the feelings and experiences of these women. At times they feel very confident; at other times they want reassurance. However, there does appear to be one notable difference. These two women sometimes want to hide their lack of confidence, unlike the women in the previous chapter who spoke openly about this and let it show in both their working and professional lives. They often share their uncertainties and insecurities with colleagues; whereas the younger women believe that their promotion depends on both their competence and their ability to hide any self doubt from their subordinates:

In my present position my colleagues need me to be confident. Sometimes I appear confident on the outside but I am not on the inside. I do not have the self belief of some of my male colleagues. I try to get over it by really planning what I am going to do, rather than doing things 'off the cuff'. I cannot show them how insecure I feel or they and the head and governors will think that I am not ready for promotion, and I want promotion.

(Sarah)

Outwardly I must be confident or at least give off an aura of confidence. But in fact I often lack confidence because I am shouldering too much the responsibility and pressures are tremendous in this job.

(Jill)

The fact that they are not hiding this from Peter would suggest that they are reproducing gender relations, by deferring to his institutional power by deferring to him for expert advice on how to do the job.

Debbie, who featured in the previous chapter, also works in this school as a deputy head but does not see the ambiguities and describes the young female middle managers in the following terms:

They are so confident; they are go-getters with carefully thought-out career plans and actions. They take maternity leave and are back in school within six weeks. I think they are so charismatic too, their departments stand out; they let you know their vision. They will make headship.

Debbie sees their style as emulating that of men, and insists that gender is not seen as a problem for these women. She explains:

They are very competitive in meetings and you can almost see them wanting to be better than the blokes. This group of women have established their own culture within the school; they are convinced of their ability. They are known as the trouser suit brigade.

Perhaps it is no surprise to read this gendered response from Debbie; she has a very masculine view of leadership. She uses masculine imagery in describing the way she believes women should perform as headteachers. When talking about these younger women, Debbie expresses an admiration for them. In her opinion, they are leading in a masculine way and do not under-sell themselves. They are prepared to show just how good they are at their jobs, and want their skills to be recognised publicly within the school. It needs of course to be acknowledged that Peter does allow space for this to happen. These women have planned their career trajectories with greater care than their older colleagues within the school. This makes them appear confident and self-assured but, as I have shown, the similar doubts and insecurities emerged during the interviews. Debbie does not see this insecurity, as the two women keep this well hidden. Sarah and Jill both want to make career moves but see no advantage in moving sideways; for both of them it has to be an upward move. They have also set themselves time limits and targets. They aim to become

experts and competent in their present jobs but within a set time frame. During this time they were prepared to seek advice on gaining new experiences and seeking training to increase their skills and expertise. They are not afraid to push themselves forward: for example, on whole school training days they were prepared to lead and give presentations and were not phased or daunted by this experience:

I enjoy doing presentations; to be honest a presentation is a gift. If you prepare well and work hard at it you can impress. Once you impress people some will begin to listen to your ideas and take you seriously.

(Jill)

Jill shows here that she is ambitious and is letting the head and staff know this by doing these presentations. She wants to be acknowledged as someone who has power and influence within the school. Yet Jill, like the other women in this study, does feel the need to perform and is concerned about the expectations of others. In order to provide effective leadership Jill believes she has to be seen to offer strong decisive leadership and although she agonises about her ability, she is only prepared to share this with the headteacher. This is not unusual as so many selection panels believe strong leadership is a necessary requirement for a headteacher (Riley, 1998). Jill's lack of confidence, she thinks can be traced back to a gendered childhood. She talks about being very shy in school and believes that her English teacher gave her the self-confidence she needed as she recognised her ability in this subject:

I was a really shy, a very, very quite girl. I can remember being asked to read in front of my class-mates. I was terrified. The teacher said, 'all I want you to do is to read for one minute from,' The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe'. I shook so much I could hardly read it. But I did it, she had confidence in me.

She also says her mother was very ambitious and wanted Jill to go to university. Like most of the other women in this study, Jill was the first in her family to go into higher education.

Sarah maintains that in her case it was her father who was very influential. She 'coasted' through her GCSE and A level examinations and was even tempted to give up and leave school:

My dad pushed me through those three years and after that I wanted to do well. Now I have a point to prove to him that I am not just a teacher but I have made it a career and I am capable of going all the way to the top. When I got the assistant head's job the first person I wanted to tell was my dad.

Hall (1996) found all of her successful headteachers identified with their fathers rather than their mothers. It could be that these women associate masculine traits with leadership. At this point in time, they believe, these traits to be more acceptable to them in their ambition to become leaders. Both Sarah's and Jill's biographies show that there is a strong parental influence on the choice of career: they intended to become teachers. In Sarah's case she now wants to become a headteacher not only to fulfil her own ambition, but to please her parents, particularly her father. White et al (1992) also found successful women were profoundly influenced by their fathers. My study also reveals another aspect of women's gendered lives in that Sarah not only seeks to please her father but his approval fuels her ambition to become a headteacher. In addition I believe she also seeks, strategically and knowingly, to please the headteacher in her efforts to secure promotion because it is Peter who will supply her references. Sarah's story provided an example of how gendered experiences are handled differently by women of different ages. The women in White et al.'s (1992) study were of a similar age to Sarah. It was interesting to discover that this contrasts with the ambitions of the older women in my study. Lesley, Anita, Fiona and Mary were encouraged in their aspirations for headship by partners and colleagues rather than parents. There is a gender dimension here in that Sarah's self-esteem and aspirations are still dependent on the need to please her father, or the substitute father figure who is Peter. She still performs the role of the 'good' daughter in parts of her professional life. It is appropriate at this point to consider the question of gender equality within the school.

5.4 Attitudes towards gender equality

I wanted to examine the interviews with the head and chair of governors to discover their attitudes to the women managers. Firstly, to look for explanations for these attitudes, and secondly to try to find what had influenced their views on gender equality. I think the interview with Peter puzzled me more than any of the others. He was very confident throughout, often wanting to set the agenda, talking about his own career at length. Eventually, after listening very carefully I began to 'hear' the story he was telling about his attitude to female colleagues and his leadership approach. I initially had thought he had embraced both a masculine and feminine approach to leadership, and was impressed by the opportunities he seemed to make available to women at his school. This assumption shifted as I began to analyse the interview.

Peter said he was not so interested in the day-to-day administrative tasks involved in managing any school: this could be easily delegated and usually to female staff, typifying a masculine approach (Ozga, 1993). He commented:

Women offer thoroughness in their leadership and management, paying attention to detail that some of my male colleagues might not offer. Both the men and women have ideas but in my experience it's the women who think about the details. For example we may discuss new assembly or duty rotas and it is usually the women that sort out how it will work in practice.

In the previous chapter, Siobhan complained that she was given the examination secretary job when she became deputy head. The head was testing her attention to detail when completing such tasks. This is something that I would suggest, from my own experience, would never happen to a male colleague. I have not come across this happening to a man either in school or referred to in any of the studies in my literature survey. Although Peter acknowledges the usefulness of this ability to fastidiously carry out certain tasks he does not appear to reward or value it to any great extent. It is not seen as a prerequisite to effective leadership. The women in this study do not give these activities any status either. The chair of governors also endorsed this view:

Women's skills as mothers and wives are not recognised. They have lots of skills here that are just second nature to women and are transferable to leadership and management situations but to be honest when you think about the role of headteacher you have to focus on the big picture. Take the budget: someone can do the everyday details; it's the strategic decisions that get the status.

None of the women in this study placed any value on the organisational skills she needed to balance work and home so perhaps it is not surprising that society does not recognise the value of this experience. Peter's story involved many contradictions, and the dualism between male and female leadership approaches began to emerge. As the interview progressed I began to think he might have a feminine approach to his leadership of the school. However, I came to the realisation that it was not a feminine approach but it was undoubtedly a more democratic approach, but within gendered boundaries. He described his leadership style in the following way:

It is very people centred, leading with the people rather than, 'This is how it's going to be, this is how we will do it', it's using people to help form the way the school will go. A good example of this is when I first came here in 1998 we had two in-service training days devoted to getting everybody involved in discussing the aims of the school.

When I asked what responsibilities he had given the three women in his senior management team it became clear they had been given the 'softer' options, dealing with personnel and training, pastoral care, coaching and mentoring while the men in the team were responsible for curriculum and finance. It would appear that he has promoted these women to do the work men in the team would prefer not to do. The women gain in the short and even in the medium term, but so does the headteacher. Herein lie the contradictions of gendered structures. Peter attempts to be more democratic, even if not feminist, and in so doing constructively enables opportunities for these younger women to advance their careers. Yet because there are gender limits to his actions they can progress, but only so far under his guidance.

Jill speculated whether her promotion by Peter to the senior management team, at a relatively young age, would encourage other women in this school to realise

their ambitions and aspirations for leadership. She believes other female managers now see Peter as someone willing to support their career development. This is arguably positive and should be acknowledged. He encourages Jill to find her own solutions and discusses possible options for her to follow. Yet it did seem still to be a rather gendered relationship. Jill explains:

He knows if I make mistakes he would never have to find out, he would always know that I would come and tell him the mistakes before he had to discover them.

Here, Jill draws on a range of subjectivities, at times adopting a 'good girl' discourse at other times a 'powerful woman' discourse. She assumes different positioning to fit the different context in which she finds herself, namely 'good girl' to the head, 'powerful woman' to those colleagues she line manages. In the case of her colleagues she is always careful not to let her doubts and feelings show because she perceives that this would be seen as a sign of weakness.

Peter is convinced his leadership has worked to counteract some of the traditional values that he inherited within the school. This does seem to be the case. The school management team and middle managers were predominately male when he came to the school. He has altered that balance and the school now has a senior management that consists of three men and three women. He has been instrumental in promoting women to posts at middle management level. No doubt this will provide the opportunities for them to progress into senior management positions, but there are ambiguities in his position in supporting the women, yet at the same time limiting them:

I think it is very much about middle management. If you give people the opportunity of middle management then you are providing pathways beyond it. My middle management team consists of twenty four people, twenty of them are women and they are superb managers. I think heads have a responsibility to help all colleagues on to the next stage of their careers.

He is also of the opinion that this situation, females being in a majority of middle management posts, is unusual in this educational district. He sees the

district as quite traditional compared to other educational authorities where he has worked. Peter has taken practical steps to alleviate this situation. He was instrumental in changing the composition of his governing body: when he arrived in the school it was a male-dominated committee, Ann and two parents were the only women on this governing body. The balance has changed: Ann is now chair and there are more women from the teaching and support staff; in addition there is female representation from the local authority.

Ann also told me about one interview panel that was to appoint a deputy head:

The vice chair said to me, 'If a woman gets it the SMT will be dominated by females.' He had not made those observations or comments when it had been dominated by males for the last twenty years.

Ann had the support of Peter and some of the other governors who wanted the best candidate appointed regardless of whether they were male or female. A woman was appointed: she had clear ideas, was enthusiastic and humorous. This candidate had done her research on the school and talked at length about the contribution she would make. The views of the male vice chair did not come as a surprise because so often men feel the need to protect what they see as their position, in Connell's (2002) terms their patriarchal dividend. I think both Peter and Ann want to be seen to have developed an agenda that allows women to compete on an equal basis when applying for promotion within this school. They have helped women to gain access to promoted posts. Their actions could be characterised as falling within a liberal feminist agenda, limited but still an improvement. Here, there is an underlying belief that for women, gaining equality is all important. It is, therefore, only a matter of moving on from their traditional roles and gaining access to those positions of power normally occupied by men. Ann was careful to point out that it must be on merit alone:

I do not believe in positive discrimination. I would not want to see all female short lists, rather I want to promote women's qualities and encourage them.

Ann does have a strong belief in equal opportunities. She remembers, at this point in the interview, the way she had encouraged female Asian support staff to embark on teaching careers when she was working as a teacher. She also believes that it is important even today to continue to focus on raising girls' achievements and aspirations in school. She says that she provides a role model for the girls by speaking at awards evenings, parent evenings and in school assemblies:

I do that now as chair of governors, showing the girls that women can be powerful.

Both Peter and Ann have said that they have an educational philosophy based on social justice. They both talk passionately of wanting to provide opportunities for pupils regardless of race or class. Again, this agenda stems from their childhood experiences. Earlier in the chapter Ann considers herself a 'loser' because she failed her 11+ examination. Peter also talks passionately about being let down in his comprehensive school by inadequate teaching. Both have a desire to provide a better experience for the pupils in the school, and perhaps their agenda to provide better opportunities has influenced their attitudes to promoting staff regardless of gender. On the other hand I noticed ambivalence in both Peter's and Ann's actions and attitudes. On one hand they show gender awareness, but at the same time they are gender conservative in that they want to promote women but confine them to the 'softer' roles dealing with personnel and pastoral issues. What is interesting is that Peter and Ann both pursue a broad social justice agenda, while both shifting and reproducing gender norms. This brings me to conclude that it is the patriarchal dividend at work. It is in the male interest to preserve and protect leadership positions, but it is also difficult for men like Peter to see and understand their own privilege (their unearned 'dividend'). In Ann's case it can be explained by the fact she is prepared to promote women and encourage them to aim for headship but they have to prove themselves to be better than men. Ann assumes that men and women are essentially the same. She believes the problem of the under-

representation of women will be solved if they are given equal access when applying for promoted posts within the school. Her assumption seems to be that if these women are capable and have the ability then they will obtain senior positions. However, the problem is that this does not challenge any of the existing norms or structures present within the school, even as women have some space to progress.

At this point I wish to move on to consider the power relations which exist within the school and to consider how these micro-interactions produce and reproduce gendered relations which eventually impact upon the careers of the two younger women managers within the school.

5.5 The micro interactions that produce and reproduce gendered relations

The concept of gender has been central to this study; it has allowed me to focus on the differences in positions of power held by men and women in schools in the area in which I work. In theorising power one needs to ask: what are people's experiences, within the school, of how this power is exercised? It is worth noting here that not only is gender relational between men and women but also between diverse women. Ann's relationship with Jill and Sarah represents one set of relationships, while Jill and Sarah's relationship represents another. In addition, all four women have a different relationship with Peter; this revolves round his power. Peter has claimed that he is prepared to delegate the power he holds as headteacher. He believes a prerequisite is the ability to be a good communicator. This, in his opinion, is essential in order to build and maintain a team approach. However, he acknowledges that he is also very keen on competition and encourages it within the staff, emphasising his masculine values:

I have encouraged these young female heads of department to work together and feed off each other, and to have some healthy competition between each other. They now set themselves some very high standards.

Certainly this comes through with Sarah and Jill who both talk at length about the competitive activities within the school and are flattered by the fact that others in schools see them as competitive:

These young female middle managers are perceived to be a very powerful group within the school. They compete with each other over things like examination results and to get the best resources for their departments.

(Ann)

Sarah and Jill were in competition for the internal post of assistant head: Jill was appointed and Sarah decided to apply to another for a similar post.

Interestingly, the need to compete was absent from the stories told by the six older women who throughout their stories talked about co-operation and shied away from open competition. These women were not subjected to the recent Threshold and Performance Management process which Mahony et al. have described as 'individualistic, and particularly hostile to women' (p146). In order to pass through this process Sarah and Jill, along with all other teachers with five years experience, had to produce a profile outlining their competencies and achievements. Mahony et al. comment:

The language of the targets, moreover, is itself highly gendered: they are 'hard nosed', 'tough', there to be aimed at and preferably hit.

(Mahony et al., 2004: 137)

This process appears to have been designed to encourage competition and reflect a masculine agenda.

It is also difficult to deny that Peter at times seems somewhat paternal in the way he treats the female leaders on his staff. He talks about the need, 'to look after them', and to develop their skills and talents. For example, Peter believes them to be better communicators than their male colleagues:

These women are particularly good at communicating with anybody and everybody; this is not so well developed in my male colleagues.

Consequently he has given them tasks that require good communication skills, looking after the needs of both pupils and staff. He also reflects on how the women take on other people's problems:

They take an awful lot on their shoulders: take it home with them too, worry about things in school. I don't take the job home with me. You have to have the ability to detach yourself from it. I have the confidence in myself that I am doing a good job and if things go pear shaped then I have the emotional strength to carry myself through and put it right.

Peter is able to separate his personal and professional identity; this enables him to draw a distinction between work and home. But the women in my study find this difficult, with the exception of Jill who seems to be able to manage to avoid the intrusions and emotions of the work place spilling into her private life. This too, is in contrast to the other women in this study who constantly reflect on everything they do, whether it is successful or not. Self-confidence and emotional strength seem to be crucial ingredients to gaining and sustaining a successful headship. It is this ability to remain confident no matter how critical others are, or how difficult the problems appear, that male colleagues seem to possess to a greater degree than any of the women in this study.

The women often saw this male self-confident attitude as arrogance, but what is clear is that it gives men the advantage of being perceived as the 'natural' leaders. However, White et al. (1992) have shown that successful women have seized upon this: they are self-confident and demonstrate a belief in their own potential for leadership positions. These young successful women believe they can reach top positions and therefore often do so. They are not afraid to make mistakes on the way. It is interesting that older women in my study were afraid of making mistakes. They also believed that when men made mistakes, these were tolerated to a greater extent than those made by women. This is supported by Cammack and Phillips (2002) study of women teachers. They found these women readily admitted their mistakes when performing their professional roles. At the same time they believed this recognition was not in their best

interests as admitting mistakes was seen by others as incompetence and inexperience. It was taken as an indication of their unsuitability for promotion. Sarah reflects on this when she says that she hides her lack of confidence from certain people because she wants promotion. White et al. have suggested that successful women seem to connect to masculine approaches to power and are confident. Blackmore (1999) concludes that feminine ways of working, such as active listening and emotional commitment to both people and the job, fails to impress those responsible for appointing headteachers. The women in Hall's (1996) study found a confidence in their own management styles. They appear to have overcome the barriers identified by Leithwood et al.'s (1992) research. These writers claim that even when gender groups perform equally, their evidence suggests, that males are still more confident about their ability to perform well. They state:

Because formal school leadership roles have traditionally been dominated by men, results of our studies may be indicating a lack of self-confidence, on the part of women, unrelated to actual administrative ability.

(Leithwood et al., 1992: 165)

There was a significant difference between Jill and Sarah and the other women I interviewed over the issue of confidence. The two younger women always tried to show publicly the outward appearance of confidence and were pleased to be seen by colleagues as strong women. Jill comments:

People in school see me as confident, and somebody who knows where she is going and how she is going to get there, but in reality this is not how I actually feel. At times I am unsure of what I am doing. I do not even know if I am good enough to move on to the next level of promotion. I must make sure I can do this job well first.

Inwardly and privately they reflected and questioned their performance in much the same way as their more mature counterparts. Sarah sums up her feelings on getting the assistant head's job:

I give off this aura of being confident but now I have got a job at a new level, lots more responsibility, I get pangs of anxiety and feel a little insecure. Will I be able to do the job?

This reflects Davies (1992) claim that women have to prove their competence whereas men are assumed to be confident unless they prove otherwise.

Absolute confidence and belief in one's ability only came from Peter and can be epitomised in a statement he made when talking about how colleagues saw his leadership:

I underwent an evaluation of my headship, it is done by an independent body. Everybody here thought I was near to perfection as they could imagine.

Throughout hours of interviews none of the women ever spoke about themselves in such glowing terms. It illustrates a masculine self-confidence that the women in this study so often reject, or simply cannot achieve. Peter on the other hand is very sure of his leadership position and ability which is recognised by his staff and governors. Only Debbie sees these two women as both competent and competitive; and Sarah and Jill were adamant that Debbie is not an appropriate role model for them. They do not like her leadership style. They see her as strong, directive and at times ruthless. Debbie, as we have seen earlier, associates a democratic leadership style with inefficiency and believes it to be ineffective. Both Jill and Sarah are wary of Debbie:

You have to be careful not to get on the wrong side of Debbie. She does not like incompetence in any shape or form. She deals with incompetence by shouting: perhaps even bullying those who show this trait.

(Sarah)

They feel that Debbie has built her power within the school because she has been there a long time. They also see Peter using Debbie when he feels the need to reprimand pupils or staff as she is not afraid to let people know that they are not meeting expectations:

Debbie does not suffer fools or people who do not pull their weight. Peter uses her if unpleasant tasks have to be done. She is not afraid to put people, awkward parents and staff in their place.

(Sarah)

However, I felt that both Sarah and Jill were alienated by what they see as Debbie's masculine exercise of power. Whereas they see Peter exercising his power in a gentler and also a more democratic way and are prepared to collude with him. They never appear to challenge his power openly and therefore do not offer any threat to him. Gunter (1997) has indicated that compliance and conformity are rewarded and reminds us that those who challenge are unlikely to be promoted to positions of power.

I was also surprised by remarks made by Jill, when I asked her about her contributions to the discussions and debates in senior management meetings. She described the way that each member of the team was required to feed back on their particular roles and tasks. She implied that the meetings were very much reporting sessions and that Peter did most of the talking:

Peter controls, he dominates the conversation throughout our meetings. He likes to control and keep the lid on things. He is always talking about my school, my staff.

Perhaps this is indicative of another aspect of gendered relations; men and women communicate differently. Men employ competitive language, dominate meetings, claim ownership and control, whereas women are more likely to create opportunities to include others and may indeed use language which embraces others (Tannen, 1995). Hargreaves (1994) suggests that when headteachers refer to 'my school' it indicates proprietary claims and attitudes; the head is claiming individual ownership of the school rather than collective ownership. This is an indication of male ownership in which power is exercised over others.

Jill also surprised me when she said Peter often took ideas she had put to him and adopted them as his own. Unlike Debbie, who was annoyed by this practice Jill comments:

If someone on my level does it, it grates but I don't go up to anyone else and say, 'Peter has pinched my ideas', because I don't see it that way. He is my boss so he is entitled to do it.

Ramsay (1993) refers to this common practice as 'professional betrayal'. Peter is taking the credit for Jill's ideas and by doing so he is positioning her as less powerful. At other times she is given power by Peter but he is always in control. By his actions he is regulating her power to carry out the tasks he has given her, yet at the same time giving her opportunities to further her career. Nonetheless he decides which tasks she will be given and which ones he will withhold.

Of course there are examples of women headteachers who are as controlling as male colleagues when managing staff within their schools. Reay and Ball (2000) describe how one female headteacher not only liked to make sure her staff are in competition with one another in order to drive up standards. They relate in detail the way she enjoyed deliberately initiating rumours to unsettle and unnerve her staff. The point is not to essentialise women or men as being able to be only one kind of subject, but to consider how masculine leadership approaches dominate and control, whether exercised by men or women.

Jill does not challenge Peter because she is still building her career and using her experience strategically in this school to prepare her for her next job. She does not want to challenge Peter because she will need his support in order to be considered for promotion. Jill was also very optimistic about her future and the future for other women on the staff. She explains her reasons:

I think there will be more female heads because there are more men out there prepared to do more in the home. My partner is our child carer; Sarah's husband also helps her a great deal. The more men are prepared to stay at home, the more women can give. I will need a reference from Peter for my next job so I need to keep on working hard here.

Sarah, too is not averse to using the ideas of others and claiming them for herself. She will use the ideas gleaned from others and claim them for herself in

order to impress Peter. She describes how she will discuss her ideas with other people in order to gauge a reaction before discussing them with Peter. Here we see Sarah at times adopting gender solidarity with her colleagues, but at other times indulging in gender competition by taking the ideas of others and claiming them as her own when in a meeting with the head.

Unlike some of the older women, (for example Fiona, Lesley and Anita), Jill and Sarah do not feel intimidated by male colleagues, for they always make sure they are well prepared in meetings and this enables them to compete on equal terms with their male colleagues. They claim they are able to do this confidently because of the network of support they have established. The two women have built up a reputation for being efficient, effective and competent managers. The competitive image created by, and for them by Peter has undoubtedly helped them in their leadership positions. The head has encouraged this culture and although these women are the beneficiaries it would seem unlikely that there will be any sea-change in gender relations within the school. Nor will be any easier for the women who follow Sarah and Jill to assert themselves as leaders because the structures and processes remain the same. Each woman will have to construct her leadership pathway anew.

These women are arguably reproducing normalising gender relations because of the relationship they have established with the headteacher, deferring to his power, seeing this as one way to build their careers. Sarah and Jill are aware of the institutionalised gender inequalities and the different values put on men's and women's work, speech and power, and have adopted strategies in order to overcome them. They are prepared to accept the head's positioning of them within the school in order to move up and out into more senior roles. Whether or not they will do things differently once they have achieved headship positions is open to speculation.

Sarah is ambitious and talks about her plans to develop her career. She is clear that she needs to work hard and put in extra time at school if she wants to go for promotion, but still has pangs of guilt about leaving her own children and returning to work. Nevertheless, she feels the need to keep demonstrating her commitment to her work:

I feel tremendously guilty about it. In my ideal world I would be out of the door at 3.30 pm and be picking them up from nursery. As it is I don't pick them up until 6pm. I feel that I don't do a good job as their mother, sometimes I think I'm not doing this job as well as I could because I can't start on the preparation until 8pm. Others on the staff, I know, have similar feelings to mine.

So, even younger women are torn between having a family and advancing their careers. Sarah and Jill do experience feelings of guilt over their child-care responsibilities just as some of the older women in this study had done. Sarah is only too aware of the disapproval from colleagues because of the short time she spent away from school on maternity leave:

One said, 'How can you leave those two gorgeous children. I would want to be at home seeing them grow up.'

The problem appears to be that Jill and Sarah are both seen as strong, ambitious women. They pose a threat to male colleagues by working hard and being successful. Nevertheless, they still have to juggle their time to achieve a work-life balance. Sarah also says she was careful in her interview for the assistant head's post not to mention she had young children:

I remember when I went for a similar position here, the chair of governors telling me that I should not be too disappointed not to have got the job. She said I looked tired and needed time to be with my children, and that I had done well to cope with the department management.

This would suggest that even these younger women cannot escape their own and society's gendered assumptions and structures. Peter appears supportive: he speaks about the need for his female middle managers to keep their leadership responsibility and salary. He is prepared to allow them to work on a part-time basis. Yet, I had the impression that he does not really have an understanding of

what is actually involved in working and caring for young children. I think the following statement shows that he underplays the difficulties facing these women, not really understanding the pressures they face from managing home and work:

Some of our heads of departments have gone on maternity leave. There is no reason why they shouldn't come back on the same rung of the ladder, even if it is on a part-time basis.

These women feel the need to show they are in control and often do it by working extremely hard. However, one young head of department confided in Sarah that she often felt exhausted by trying to fit five days' work into three. This echoes what all of the women in this study reiterated time and again: that as women they feel the need to work twice as hard in order to gain recognition from the superiors. In order to sustain this approval they have to constantly keep on proving their capabilities.

I have also examined the choices, decisions and dilemmas faced by a younger generation of aspiring headteachers. The evidence has revealed that their experiences in many instances mirror those of the older generation of women. For example, the agonies and guilt over balancing child-care responsibilities with those of the job. But the actions have been very different because the younger women have taken the decision not to spend a long period out of the job. This means they are putting themselves forward for promotion at an earlier stage in their careers. They have also shown a greater determination in seeking and obtaining leadership positions. Although Jill and Sarah were able to express their self doubts to me, in the work place they were careful to keep them hidden from colleagues. They were not as willing to share their concerns about their ability to do the job with their colleagues as the older women had been. They had recognised the benefits of creating a network of support within the school which had significantly enhanced their self-esteem and helped to secure to secure their identities as leaders, albeit at middle management level. Both these women were still determined to strive for headship positions.

To conclude this section I emphasise how these women have sought to represent themselves within the school. They are hard working, efficient and claim to have adopted a collegiate approach in their leadership. They are ambivalent about their confidence, but compensate for this by accepting the perception others have of them as being powerful women. The head can take credit for encouraging them to be competitive, moulding them for future leadership in a gendered school system. He has certainly helped Sarah and Jill to achieve positions in senior management at a relatively young age. At the same time Peter appears to be holding open only one way to be a head, thereby holding gender structures in place. I suspect that the women who follow Sarah and Jill will face similar problems and have to negotiate them over again because nothing has changed within the school.

In my final chapter I intend to take stock of my study and draw some conclusions from my research, and to suggest ways in which women could, in future, gain a fairer access to headship positions.

CHAPTER SIX

Towards Theorising Gender and Leadership for Better Practice

In this concluding chapter I return to my research questions to explain the situated opportunities and constraints faced by the women in my study along their different journeys into leadership positions. Through my analysis and interpretation I have demonstrated the ways in which individual biographies have influenced working lives, sometimes encouraging women's ambitions, at other times having a detrimental effect on them. I have indicated that these women's career choices have been shaped both by their personal and their work lives, and how they constantly struggle to manage their private and professional lives. In addition I have highlighted the discourses surrounding family, education and workplace relationships, enabling me to explain whether these influences have opened opportunities or placed restrictions and barriers on women seeking promotion, or have done both of these at different times in their lives.

I originally thought there might be regional factors that, when added to individual factors, and institutional situations, might possibly account for aspects of this. It is unusual that, in this educational district, there is a distinct absence of women in leadership positions. I have argued that gender relations and structures of gender have had a significant influence on these women's stories, intersecting with personal biographies, institutional conditions and regional specificity. Gender has influenced women in learning to be leaders; it has also impacted on the type of leaders they wanted to be, and the type of leaders they eventually became.

I have described how the women in my study have negotiated their professional identities in most cases without an explicit or reflexive awareness of their gendered positions and relationships. Yet it became clear when analysing their

stories that in both private and professional lives issues of gender are played out. Gender is apparent in the inter-relationships which exist in the work place: here the issue of gender manifests itself in the struggles and successes experienced through the women's exercise of power, or their turning away from power. Women seek to position themselves either to conform to leadership expectations in some cases, and in others come to resist them. By describing the situation in which these women are located I have been able to offer explanations for their experiences in terms of their gender positions. For some of the women these experiences have encouraged them to seek promotions, while at the same time other women have failed to connect with power issues and have come to reject headship positions. This is certainly true of Lesley and Anita.

In chapters four and five I indicated that age and generation shaped the choices and actions made by the women in this study. What I believe this piece of research has shown is that stamina is required not only on the route into headship, but also once that headship position has been acquired. I now turn to each of my original research questions to consider how my empirical interview data, and my analysis and interpretation help in answering each question, or at least in exploring the issues raised by the questions.

6.1 What individual/biographical factors deter or encourage women to become headteachers?

The stories recounted in the earlier chapters suggest deeply gendered experiences, albeit that this may not always be reflexively recognised by the women themselves. Gender does account for the way their identities have been formed, how they see themselves and how they think others see or want to see them. I have argued that past experiences of education and family impact on who they want to be and have influenced the career choices they have made. Moreover, their experiences as wives and mothers have by and large hindered their progress into leadership, even where partners may now be taking on a

greater share of child care and rearing. I am aware that the skills acquired in the domestic sphere are not recognised as important or culturally valued for leadership positions, either by society generally or selection panels in particular. It is because gender differences have been largely ignored they may have become institutionalised. The result is that women have to strive constantly to overcome the inequality that stems from this situation. It would appear that women have to work harder than male colleagues, and to have a lot more determination if they are to succeed. The school is then a site where gender is played out.

This confirms similar findings by researchers including Coleman (2003), Evetts (1994) and Hall (1996). Furthermore Blackmore (1999) has suggested that because women do not think in terms of career paths and are often without clear career aspirations or pathways, their professional identities are tied to their capacity to do things well, indeed to be especially competent. This is born out by several women in my study. Sarah and Jill spoke at length about their desire always to perform well. This is exemplified by the length of time and effort they put into staff presentations and preparations for meetings. Lesley, too, was constantly questioning her capabilities and spent time ensuring her policies and practices for improving teaching and learning were 'perfect'.

The experiences of these professional women have shaped their identities as leaders. They learn what is and is not acceptable in headship positions. The women, collectively, did not have many positive role models. When support was offered to both generations of women it tended to be paternalistic and sometimes patronising. The problem is that leadership is still viewed in masculine terms, or at best presented as gender neutral. The eight women had their own view on the way they were expected to lead and believed they were required to follow masculine approaches to leadership. Lesley and Anita rejected this approach and have made a decision that they no longer wish to proceed with their leadership ambitions. Fiona and Siobhan only felt free to

adopt a feminine approach to management once they had secured their leadership positions.

While leadership approaches are not wholly determined by gender structures, nor is the agency of these women free-floating, and their decisions are complicated, with complex outcomes. It may also be that their decisions are in their own best interests at times, for example colluding with male power, but do nothing to destabilise gender power. However, once in post they may be free to re-identify themselves as leaders on their terms. For example Hall (1996) illustrates how women operate as school leaders in what she terms 'alternative entrepreneurs' (p192). Hall maintains that the women in her study combine entrepreneurial characteristics with a value framework that emphasises a collegiate and moral approach to leadership: 'where means were important as well as ends' (p202). Fiona's biography provides a good example of a woman exercising leadership on her terms. She states:

I have deliberately gone into my headship position adopting a feminine style of leadership. My leadership style centres on team work and making sure everyone is on board. Touch wood, it seems to be working.

A major problem for women, according to Reay and Ball (2000), is that 'holding power continues to be an "extraordinary" situation for women in the British labour market.' (p147). The difficulties of securing headship positions were discussed by both Fiona and Siobhan. Fiona decided she was more likely to succeed if she applied for headship posts in the middle school sector, where schools are generally smaller. She had failed on numerous occasions to gain headship in the secondary sector. Siobhan, too, was successful when she 'lowered her sights' and applied for headships in a smaller secondary school. Reay and Ball (2000) noted that women who have succeeded in leadership tend to adopt male ways of working in order to be regarded as authentic leaders. Debbie certainly subscribes to this view, believing that only then is she likely to

obtain a headship. Unfortunately this tendency in women is likely to perpetuate gender disadvantage. Likewise, Anita's and Lesley's decision not to proceed with their headship ambition perpetuates gender power.

I believe that my analysis and interpretation in chapters four and five support the view that there is not one common or distinct way of leading for women. The women in my study show multiple and diverse leadership approaches (Coleman, 2002).

6.2 What institutional/regional factors encourage or deter women from seeking headship positions?

A theme relevant throughout the interviews was that schools have regular sets of arrangements surrounding gender, and that these help to decide which individuals are appointed to certain roles and determine the type of responsibility they are given. The younger women in this study tended to resist this situation and insist on being given roles which were not confined to pastoral and personnel matters. Jill, for instance, was able to gain the responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning, bringing her into close contact with the curriculum, an important area if one is seeking headship positions. Likewise Sarah's new post involves a responsibility for financial issues and controlling budgets, another important skill that selection panels look for when appointing headteachers (Adler, 1993; Ouston, 1993).

During the course of my research I realised that patriarchal practices still continue to exist in the schools where we work. Walby's, (1990) thesis illustrates that although the patriarchal grip may have diminished somewhat in the home, it remains a dominant force in the workplace. Here, it continues to influence the way people see and use power. Peter demonstrates this as he encourages and helps Jill and Sarah into leadership positions, but on his own (male) terms.

However, the two women accept Peter's patronage because they see it as useful for their career progression. The analysis of the data gathered for this study has shown that women are not always passive towards male power. They resist it and develop their own forms of power and influence, which often brings benefits to themselves and to the school. Some of these women have effectively used their power to put equity issues on their school's agenda. Lesley, for example, shied away from the leader she felt she ought to become in order to secure a headship, and is content with the influence she has over the curriculum in her position as deputy head. Lesley provides a good illustration of how women exercise agency in determining their career patterns. Despite the barriers that have been placed before them some women have chosen either to find ways and means of overcoming the obstacles, or alternatively have taken a decision to make their mark in school from their current positions as deputies. It is clear from their stories that the ability to exercise their power has had an impact both on pupils' learning and the learning environments provided.

In chapter two I discussed Connell's (2002) four dimensions of gender: power relations; production relations; emotional relations, and symbolic relations. I found these dimensions of gender particularly helpful. The concept of production relations offered a new insight as this dimension, according to Connell, is not simply confined to a division of labour, that is, certain tasks performed by women; others by men. It is much more subtle, in that those qualities associated with feminine approaches to leadership are often aligned with social justice issues and offering emotional support. These are often either expensive or not cost effective and therefore not encouraged in a system that is driven by economic considerations. For example, Anita's support for improving reading skills was undermined by the head because of the financial costs involved.

Emotional relations are identified as a further dimension of gender in Connell's (2002) model. Emotions form a part of our self-esteem, our belief in ourselves,

they can add or detract from our feelings of self-worth in our performance when carrying out our roles and responsibilities in schools. In Jill's case we see her playing down, or at least adjusting and not challenging her headteacher when he puts forward her ideas as his own. To have challenged Peter would have left Jill vulnerable as she needs to rely on his support when she next seeks promotion. Other women in the study described how they felt upset and angry after being excluded from conversations or had had their ideas and suggestions ignored in meetings. This lowers self-confidence and women begin to question their ability to do their present job, let alone seek promotion. Self-confidence or lack of it has been shown to be a major source of encouragement in some cases, and in others a major factor in deterring women in my study from seeking headship positions. This was also supported by Coleman, (2002) in her study of headteachers in the United Kingdom.

Finally, I turn to the question of whether regional factors are significant. I found that five of the women in my study felt that patriarchal practices were more overt and dominant in this geographical area. These women had taught in schools in London, Birmingham and the West Midlands, where they had found more women holding senior management positions, including headship. In addition they had experiences of selection panels with traditional views about women in management. Sarah, for example, did not reveal she had twins until the interview was over as she felt to reveal this information would prejudice some of the governors' attitude towards her. She believed they would not consider her capable of balancing her child-care with the demands of the assistant head's post for which she had applied. Lesley also found herself as the 'token' woman candidate when she applied for headship posts, and tried to hide her feminist approaches to leadership during her interviews.

6.3 In what ways are structures of gender and gendered relations a significant factor?

Headship, I have argued, is a gendered concept whether this is acknowledged or not, either in the literature or within the life of the school. I believe that stories told by the two generations of women in this study show that it has not diminished to any great extent. As aspiring leaders they constantly have to demonstrate their capability to lead because there is still an assumption within the schools and in society at large that leadership is a male preserve. The younger women have to some extent shown a greater confidence in negotiating their leadership identities. They have seized every opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities; they are eager to display their leadership qualities to colleagues in a public forum. They have opted to organise and lead staff training. They are eager to volunteer to serve on influential committees inside and outside of the school in order to raise their professional profiles. Sarah and Jill are adopting some of the techniques that male colleagues have found successful over previous decades. Both women are anxious to make sure their talents are visible to others in the school in the hope that they will gain the recognition needed to help them on their route to headship.

A deeper issue for women surrounding structures of gender is the feeling of always being on display as leaders. They have to conform to expected ways of dress, speech and behaviour. This is an additional pressure in their working lives; I would argue that this pressure is rarely experienced by male colleagues. It is a direct result of the way schools are organised to suit a predominantly male culture (Grace, 1995). All leaders are expected to perform but as leadership is seen as the natural order for men, headship is still largely recognised as a predominantly male role (Coleman, 2002; Grace, 1995; Hall, 1996; Reay and Ball, 2002). Consequently, men do not constantly have to demonstrate their competencies as leaders, as their leadership identities are readily recognised. Women, on the other hand, as this data has demonstrated, constantly have to justify their positions and performances. They do this by working harder and

felt, at times, they are exploited by their present heads. Even when they have succeeded in becoming heads, as in the case of Fiona and Siobhan, they still feel the need to continue to establish and re-establish their positions as leaders. Leadership is both hard-won and fragile for women.

Added to their workload there are also the demands made upon them by their family responsibilities, society, their headteachers, governors and colleagues within the school, many of whom still view the women as principal child carers. Successive governments have also placed an emphasis on the family and family values (Arnot, 2002) and this has added further pressure, and even a sense of guilt, for these women. All of the women in this study have to balance work and home responsibilities; those who tend to put work first are the subject of criticism by colleagues and governors. There is very little support for women in any of the schools to help with these responsibilities. Although Lesley describes how she tries to support women colleagues facing difficulties with child care arrangements when support from partners or family members is not available.

Patriarchy exists in schools and has resulted in these women being given less prestigious roles and responsibilities. Fiona, Lesley and Debbie wanted to gain experience in curriculum and finance in preparation for headship posts. Their male colleagues were reluctant to relinquish their responsibilities because it gave them advantages and control within the school which they did not want to share with their female colleagues. As long as male colleagues continue to be beneficiaries they will have a vested interest in seeking to sustain and maintain patriarchy. Peter has encouraged women into middle-management positions but the senior management team is still predominantly male. It may be that patriarchal practices are more subtle in the schools today but, as these women's stories have shown, they are still evident. They emerge in the power relationships that exist within the school. They are reflected in the ways these women are treated in senior management meetings, and in the tasks they are

given. Moreover, it pervades the selection process as the interview experiences of Fiona and Siobhan only too clearly illustrate. Fiona allowed male candidates to dominate the conversations during the 'waiting' time. She states that they talked about themselves in glowing terms which added to her own discomfort and affected her confidence. Siobhan felt nervous when she faced a largely male-dominated selection panel consisting of a number of clerics, some of whom were so aggressive in their questioning that other governors became concerned as to whether or not Siobhan, a strong candidate, would withdraw from the interview. The headteacher spent some time re-assuring her that she had handled the questions appropriately, counteracting the unhelpful and unnecessarily aggressive questioning.

On occasions both generations of women in this study have demonstrated a remarkable persistence and determination in pursuit of their own ideas, particularly those connected with teaching, learning, mentoring and improving the learning environment. Some of the women have built up a network of support within their schools and show they have the capacity to withstand the pressures of patriarchal attitudes and practices. For example, Fiona was encouraged by a group of like-minded females. It was as a result of this group's support that she finally decided to apply for a headship. She has done this on her own terms and is proud of the approach she has adopted in leading and managing her school. This professional network support is as important in the workplace as that provided by partners and family in the home. Anita, on the other hand, lacks this support as a result she often feels isolated and discouraged. Her partner is constantly encouraging her to apply for promoted posts, but in spite of this she lacks the confidence in her professional ability and is reluctant to do so.

The choices made by these women reflect their beliefs, their educational philosophies and their self-esteem, but are also dependent upon the experiences they have had within the school and the decisions and choices they have made

during their teaching careers. Such choices are relational: both individual but also socially shaped with effects for the women themselves, and their colleagues and families.

6.4 How do we account for the opportunities and constraints facing prospective women headteachers?

I have also focused on the ways in which women still feel the need to perform to meet certain gendered expectations of leadership, despite having adopted a new identity as headteacher. Throughout the interviews there was a strong emphasis coming through concerning the need to prepare for headship through both formal and informal professional development and training. In addition those women who had also benefited from competent mentors and were often inspired with the confidence to seek out headship positions. Once in headship positions some of the women in this study were able to adopt their own leadership and management approaches, particularly if they had a supportive governing body that was prepared to let the headteacher be creative. Other women have found that their preferred ways of working in leadership, emotional commitment to people and the job, working collaboratively, and that active listening to people within the school fails to connect with selection panels and positively turns some women away from seeking promotion into headship positions.

My study has also shown that women do not all wish to lead in the same way. Some believe that it is necessary to adopt a more aloof or assertive approach and this can also lead to pitfalls. In fact, strong women can be equally disadvantaged, for those who adopt more masculine approaches to leadership are seen as a threat to their masculine colleagues by leading on their terms and securing headship posts. In short, the evidence from my study points to deeply embedded structures and patterns of gender in women's professional and private lives, albeit that different women navigate this gendered terrain in diverse ways.

6.5 How can women gain a fairer access to headship positions?

This question poses a problem because my study has shown that women do not start with the advantages of their male colleagues or counterparts.

Consequently I want to consider the implications of this assertion within my research for practice and policy within schools. The issue of women gaining equal access to senior positions within schools is at present receiving more attention in the press. In a recent issue of *The Guardian* (5 September 2006), Rebecca Smithers reported on the findings of a new survey by the General Teaching Council for England (GTC). One of the major findings was that women are putting their families first and consequently are kept out of the top posts in schools. The article refers to a young teacher, who having returned to school after maternity leave, found that the headteacher had appointed someone else into her job. She was offered a lower, less well-paid post. Female teachers are significantly more likely to admit that factors in their private lives, child-care or caring for elderly relatives, have limited their career prospects. The chief executive of the GTC, Carol Adams, stated she believed schools were missing out on the leadership skills and talents offered by women teachers. She called for an extension of job sharing in management posts. She also challenged the Government to rethink the masculine image of the male head who is responsible for everything, and who can easily combine career and family life. Such views resonate with views found in my research.

A sea-change is needed in order to move away from the situation where leaders in school are expected to be male. Women need to be confident to seek promotion without constantly having to justify their ambitions and desires to be leaders. Coleman (2002) has argued that not being male could give women a new freedom, the ability to move away from the dominant male discourse of leadership. It may be that new discourses of leadership could give women choices that do not exist at present for many of them. It would mean that

women are free to choose to take up leadership roles on their own terms. Women would no longer be viewed as 'abnormal' because it would enable them to transcend the social expectations of femaleness and enable them to aspire to the role of leader, (Schmuck, 1996). Conversely those who reject leadership roles and follow different paths would be doing so out of choice and not because their cultural identification was seen as implicitly less important. Blackmore (1999) has argued for a deconstruction of binary oppositions in leadership, for example male/female, power/powerless, emotional/rational. She maintains:

Such an approach, which views emotion and reason, justice and care, as integral to each other, creates possibilities to develop feminist discourses of leadership that interrogates male/female dualisms, but can also provide an ongoing analysis of their political effects.

(Blackmore 1999: 56)

The crucial factor will be to discover how we make things different for ourselves as women. However, this still begs the question: will women's way of knowing get a fairer hearing, and will women's way of doing things be recognised on equal terms with those of men?

I would maintain that women do possess the necessary skills to be successful headteachers; nevertheless more women need to be convinced that they have the required skills and capabilities to do this job. If this is the case, then a focus on women's self-confidence and self-esteem may offer suggestions and strategies for adopting more ambitious career trajectories. It may no be an easy task given that patriarchal values and structures are perpetuated in our society. This means, so often, that the activities of women are considered to be less important than those of men. If we constantly feel that to be male is to be more highly valued than female we are more likely to mimic men's ways of doing and acting. However, if we hold on to the belief that education is about improvement and empowerment, then women who are appropriately qualified are entitled to gain access to positions of authority in schools. If women are

given the opportunity to influence and determine policy, this in itself may lead to change. Once more women succeed in attaining headship, it could be that the balance will be tipped more equitably in their favour. The fact that women at present are so under-represented in headship positions does little to encourage their self-confidence or their aspirations.

Little recognition has been placed on the qualities that women bring to leadership positions. One way forward would be to place greater value on their life experiences as wives and mothers. Ozga (1993) refers to this as: 'the complex, varied and rich experience of women's lives that develops their particular styles and capacities' (p.2). She maintains that this experience is usually perceived as low-status and value-less. If we take these skills as advantage, rather than disadvantage, to leadership approaches, then it might begin to attract more women into headship posts. Kruger (1996) suggests that women in leadership are drawn towards the internal processes of their schools, for example teaching and learning, rather than external factors associated with the position. By external factors, I take her to mean the marketing of schools in increased competition with other schools, and the bidding culture. The problem is that successful headship has increasingly been measured against the ability to perform effectively in tasks concerned with business administration and financial competence. Blackmore (1999) has argued that feminine approaches to leadership have been seen as deficient, particularly when market forces have penetrated the educational system so that women's preferred leadership approaches place a further barrier preventing them from gaining promotion. In the 1990s the emphasis on effectiveness moved away from its internal features such as pedagogy, the importance of improving teaching and learning, to those external factors previously associated with business and commerce. This change of emphasis appears to have given men an advantage as they are assumed to be better than women in performing these tasks. Although this may seem stereotypical it appears to have influenced selection panels when appointing headteachers.

I would like to suggest here that the evidence provided by the women in my study shows that they are interested in improving teaching and learning. This could be an advantage because Ofsted now places less emphasis on headteachers' abilities to provide value for money than was the case with the earlier rounds of inspections from 1994. The focus is on pedagogy in the second phase of Ofsted inspections. From 2000 onwards, Ofsted judgments were made on school effectiveness, the quality of learning and the ability to improve pupil achievement (Ofsted, 2005). In response to the demand for continual improvement in pupil achievement, Harris et al. (2003) have advocated the need for schools to appoint leaders capable of establishing collaborative cultures and the ability to build a capacity for improvement. This requires leaders who are able to create professional learning communities through establishing a culture of collaboration and co-operation. In order to achieve this climate headteachers would need to establish schools that are inclusive and value individual development and achievement. In this culture, I believe, the focus moves to relationships, and encouraging people within the school to feel confident in their abilities: a sharing of a common sense of purpose. It requires a different leadership approach, it challenges the concept of a powerful single leader, leading and expecting others to follow. This type of pedagogical leadership might appeal to more women, and might encourage them to apply for such leadership roles.

Another practical step would be to re-examine the equal opportunity policies which exist both at school and local authority level, for it is clear that present policies are not effective in bringing about change. A more effective monitoring and evaluation of these policies may help to raise awareness of the situation, by informing school governors and selection panels of the problems and barriers facing aspiring women heads. However, if real change is to be effected it needs to be followed by the introduction and development of formal gender reform programmes. There are studies available that have shown the

benefits of changing male management practices, or at least acknowledging that there are many ways of leading, (Blackmore 1999; Coleman 2003; Hall 1996).

In fact Blackmore reminds us:

Equally important, the continued association of strong leadership with hard masculinity provides no alternative for those men who seek leadership, but who, as many women do, reject the values of competitiveness, coercion and control and seek to reconceptualize leadership in more socially just and inclusive ways.

(Blackmore 1999: 209)

Needless to say, women can be equally complicit in maintaining masculine discourses, for some women a collaborative style of leadership is seen as an obstacle to reaching/obtaining headship. It is only when they have become a headteacher that they are they free to enact their own preferred leadership style.

On a more practical level workplaces could become 'women friendly'. For example, rescheduling the times that meetings take place could help women to manage their work and family commitments without having to juggle and make difficult choices about which has priority at a particular moment in time. There is little evidence of schools providing nursery or crèche facilities and it would be useful to look at the advantages that could be offered here in future research projects.

On the basis of my evidence I would argue that individual women themselves need to be aware of the disadvantages they face. This may mean that in order to succeed they have to be better prepared than male colleagues because the playing field is not level. Women themselves need to do more research into ways and means of securing headship positions. Perhaps there is a need to plan their career paths more ambitiously in future. When producing their CVs they need to ensure they are carefully crafted in order to portray to the reader the

impression they are competent and confident; furthermore that self belief needs to be carried into the interview situation.

During this year's (2006) Teacher's Union Conferences, much was made of the number of unfilled vacancies for headship. Moreover, in a recent survey the GTC reported schools could face difficulties in the future with only 4% of teachers wanting to become heads in the next five years (Smithers, 2006). At the same time over 34% of headteachers are planning to retire by 2011. It could be that this situation could lead to opportunities for women to fill the vacant posts. My research has suggested that women want to move into headship, despite the demands made on their time and energy. They are prepared to take on schools where children have challenging behaviour. However, I suspect that if this proves to be their case then the post of headteacher will be devalued, as more women gain headships. Men, I would speculate, will continue to seek leadership positions but at an earlier age than women, reaching the top at a faster rate. I think that they then will move direction to the new power bases, those concerned with policy making and directing education. They may well follow Peter, the headteacher in my study, who carefully considered the type of school he wanted to lead and has now moved into an administrative role as an Assistant Director of Education within a local authority.

6. 6 Future Research

It may be useful for future researchers to look at where the new headteachers are located and to concentrate on regional differences, perhaps engaging on a larger-scale quantitative research study. After all, this study was restricted to a small sample of women and limited because it was sited in a particular district in one region of the country. Inevitably there will be similar stories to be told elsewhere, and further qualitative studies are needed. They will generate new questions and problems. Collard (2001) argues there is a need to supplement the insights surrounding gender difference that originate from small tightly-focused qualitative studies with larger broader empirical research studies in

order to re-generate a wider and balanced picture. This, he maintains, would allow for generalisations to be made. Work needs to be done on locating where the next generation of headteachers are to be recruited. It is likely at present that they are holding middle-management positions. It may be useful for a future research project to look at women teachers in middle-management positions and to reassess the links between their personal and professional lives and to reassess their training needs and support systems.

6.7 Conclusion

In conclusion I want to emphasise the contribution that this thesis has made, not only to my own professional knowledge, but to a wider knowledge base of applied research. In the process of collecting evidence, theorising and being open to peer critique I am now able to articulate and reflect upon my professional aspirations and those of others aspiring to leadership positions. Furthermore, I recognise a conceptualisation of identity as fluid and in process, as outlined in chapter two. It has been helpful to trace the changes that take place as we progress through our career pathways and the way identity shifts between a range of different roles and positions. I came to realise that there is no one 'right' way of leading, but many. Some of the women in my sample initiated their own ways of leading and exercising power. I found fundamental differences in their leadership practices and beliefs, but all of the women constantly re-assert their professional identities in the way they speak, dress and act.

Unfortunately, the issue of gender continues to be an under-researched aspect of leadership. Nevertheless, it continues also to be relevant to life in schools today. Throughout this study I have been aware of my double-sided position, in that I entered the world of academia as a practitioner. I brought to it my experience as a leader in schools; this has generated further knowledge and understanding of women aspiring to leadership positions. The evidence

collected provided a new and rich source of data analysed and interpreted within a sound conceptual framework, adding to the existing research base surrounding those aspiring to leadership positions. I hope I have chipped away some of the assumptions surrounding women who want to be leaders in schools, and have emphasised that gender can never be taken for granted if they are to be successful in their aspirations.

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