Navigating motherhood and headship in 21st century English state-funded schools

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Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration

'I, Juliet Horton, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

How do women secondary headteachers navigate motherhood and headship in 21st century English state-funded schools?

Women remain underrepresented in secondary school headship and executive headship in England. A patriarchal discourse on mothering and an education system shaped by neoliberal policies have reproduced hierarchical structures that disadvantage women and favour men. However, in the last decade, equality legislation, family policy, and a reconceptualisation of school leadership have enabled men and women to transgress dominant gender discourses to perform leadership and parenting differently.

The study explores the influence of societal expectations and organisational structures on women's leadership careers in education, specifically those with younger families. English state-funded secondary schools provide the setting for an in-depth case study detailing the opportunities and challenges of leading while mothering. Interviews were undertaken, and analysis of data and discussion formed an understanding of how a cohort of women, mothers, overcame potential barriers to achieve headship and how their motherhood enriches their leadership. Foucault and Butler inform the discussions and demonstrate how women leaders successfully challenge the hegemonic Western leadership model. Enacting leadership that can produce cultural shifts, these women leaders challenge neoliberal claims and perceptions of power to recognise and open up different approaches of power. These different approaches have important implications for school staff's well-being and work-life balance.

Essentialist binary concepts of gender continue to influence women's careers and how they perform leadership and motherhood. However, resistance to the patriarchal discourse on motherhood and the enactment of fathering aligned with the discourse on participative fathering challenge the traditional breadwinning model. The dissonance with the traditional patterns of mothering and fathering allows women the space and time to invest in their careers. The study contributes to the debate on women's school leadership, specifically along the lines of gender roles, parenthood, well-being, and institutional and policy arrangements that may serve as facilitators or barriers to achieving equality.

Impact statement

This impact statement aims to demonstrate the benefits of the thesis, both within and beyond academia. Hence, I summarise the final sections of my thesis' final chapter, which focus on the significance and relevance of research and the potential for dissemination.

Professional Impact: My initial proposal for this research developed from the gender research I undertook on the Young Global City Leaders (YGCL) project and concerns about the underrepresentation of women in secondary headship. From my experience and learning from the YGCL findings, I was concerned from the viewpoint of social justice that women were not as visible as men in the top leadership positions in secondary schools or multi-academy trusts (MAT). Furthermore, many of the women interviewed in the YGCL project were apprehensive about pursuing a leadership career because of their concerns that headship was incompatible with motherhood. In contrast, considerations around family were not mentioned by the men leaders. I felt gaining an insight into how women headteachers and executive headteachers navigate headship and motherhood could challenge women's conceptions about their careers and mothering by highlighting the opportunities of leadership.

I am currently a vice principal in a large secondary school, part of a MAT in southeast England. I lead professional development, performance management, recruitment, and retention. I work with many young women teachers and aspiring leaders. The learning from my PhD informs my approach to women's professional development and the development of family-friendly policies for all staff, including accommodation of flexible working, investment in women's professional development whilst on maternity leave, and enabling staff to fulfil family commitments. The Chief Executive Officer

(CEO) is also interested in the findings and recommendations for broader implementation across the trust.

Potential Academic Impact: This research is important in relation to the existing literature because motherhood as an academic territory has focused on the oppressive nature of motherhood; motherhood positioned as a site for empowerment has been underwritten. To achieve more equity in the workplace for women and in the home for men, reframing the patriarchal construct of motherhood is essential. My study shows how intensive mothering can be resisted to enable a more fulfilling experience of mothering and fathering.

 Furthermore, the research is important in relation to the existing literature on gender in educational leadership. Traditionally, the literature has focused on the barriers and how women overcome them. The opportunities and rewards of leadership for women and women mothering dependent-aged children have been largely overlooked. The continued struggle to recruit headteachers highlights the importance of this study in offering role models, strategies to encourage women to apply for headship and practical insights into how to lead and mother.

Contributions from my research will be disseminated at conferences through presentations and journal articles. The ideas will also be shared through my work with the local authority and multi-academy trust.

Acknowledgements

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Equally important has been the support of my family. My husband, Gareth, your constant patience and support have sustained me. My daughters, Isabel and Anna, have inspired and encouraged me to persevere.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Reluctant Revolutionaries" is the name of the book celebrating 100 years of headmistresses, published in 1974 (Glenday & Price, 1974). Lord Butler, writing in the forward (Glenday & Price, 1974), confirmed that, indeed, the headmistresses had been "revolutionaries," commending their strong spiritual convictions. Over 100 years later, Coleman (2001) also spotlighted how women headteachers continued to be exceptional, achieving headship "against the odds." Currently, women remain less visible in the higher echelons of educational leadership (Coleman, 2022; Moorosi, 2019; Fuller, 2017; Belger, 2022), illustrating that women's participation in positions of power is a phenomenon less than ordinary (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022).

The purpose of this study is to explore the opportunities leadership presents for women and the barriers that continue to disrupt women's educational leadership career trajectories by focusing on a group of head and executive headteachers who have successfully achieved leadership positions while being mothers of young children. This cohort of women has upset societal norms in a society where traditional expectations of mothers remain entrenched (Asher, 2012; Norman, 2017; Rich, 2021). Therefore, this small-scale study seeks to understand more about how women leaders experience the demands of motherhood and leadership, access examples, and consider the policy implications and organisational practise so more women teachers can feel their careers enabled and supported.

There are compelling arguments from differing perspectives about the importance of creating the conditions that encourage and enable more women into headteacher and executive headteacher positions. The neoliberal discourse presents convincing arguments on how the skills and knowledge of women leaders can improve organisational outcomes (Blackmore, 2022; Book, 2000; Kruger, 2008). Furthermore, drawing upon an untapped pool of talent is important to address the shortage of school leaders (Lynch & Worth, 2017). However, social justice is the most compelling reason to address the underrepresentation of black and white women with or without caring responsibilities (Blackmore, 2022; Fuller, 2017; Torrence et al., 2017). Social justice represents a fundamental commitment to equality (Torrence et al., 2017). Despite the ambitions of gender equity within official government discourse (Gov.uk, 2010), a patriarchal discourse on mothering (Rich, 2021) and an education system shaped by neoliberal policies continue to reproduce hierarchical structures (Torrence et al., 2017). Such structures propel men into headteacher and executive headteacher positions, excluding women from opportunities and fostering social injustice (Blackmore, 2022; Torrence et al., 2017).

There have been improvements since the 1980s in England, with more women progressing to headship. The Equality Act 2010 (Gov.uk, 2010a) prevents the most blatant forms of discrimination. However, in England, the representation of women in school leadership positions remains disproportionate to the number of women in teaching (Fuller, 2017; Showunmi, 2022; Torrence et al., 2017), and the gender pay gap in education is one of the largest of any industry (ASCL, NAHT, NGA, & #WomenEd, 2021). Headteachers are more likely to be white, middle-class men (DfE, 2021a). The situation is worse in secondary schools, and the higher up the leadership chain you go to executive principal and chief executive officers, the fewer women

occupy those positions (Fuller, 2017; Belger, 2022). Women with dependent children are even more underrepresented at all levels, and Black, Minority Ethnic (BME) women are a small minority of school leaders (DfE, 2021a).

The focus of the literature on gender in educational leadership has been to explain women's underrepresentation in headship (Moorosi, 2019). Shakeshaft (1989), Coleman (2001, 2002, 2007, 2022), Fuller (2009, 2013, 2014, 2017), and Smith (2011a, 2011b, 2016) highlight the barriers facing women aspiring to leadership. A plethora of metaphors explain the obstacles facing women aspiring to leadership, including a "glass ceiling" (Hymnowitz & Schellhardt, 1986), referring to the hidden and impenetrable structural barriers holding back women's advancement. More recently, "glass cliff" (Ryan & Haslam, 2005) describes how women are increasingly appointed to leadership positions in failing organisations. Women's progression to leadership is no longer elusive; however, referring to the metaphor "labyrinth" (Eagly & Carli, 2007), neither is it straightforward. Although equality legislation has removed broader structural barriers to women's advancement in educational leadership, organisational and societal barriers remain.

Organisational barriers to women's advancement in England have been well documented (Blackmore, 2022; Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2017; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). In the last four decades, the influence of neoliberalism on education has redefined schools as organisations and forced them to adopt organisational practices with significant implications for interpretations of who is a leader (Blackmore, 2022). The western concept of school leadership has developed according to characteristics and competencies, such as competition that appeals more to men and frequently

positions men as the natural candidates for leadership and excludes women (Blackmore, 2022; Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022).

Leadership framed through a neoliberal discourse is also often associated with structural and cultural ways of working that are seen as benefiting men more than women and are associated with long hours, meeting times, continuous career paths, and mobility (Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022; Smith, 2011a). The dilemma for women who aspire to leadership is how to meet these expectations of leadership and manage the impact on their personal lives, especially for those who wish to be or are mothers. In Coleman's studies (2007; 2011), maybe unsurprisingly, women teachers either seek headteacher roles once their children have grown up or voluntarily or involuntarily do not have children. During the 1990s and first decade of the twentieth century, when much of the research on the underrepresentation of women in headship was conducted, women faced systemic derailing that constrained their leadership career trajectory, and women who had children were especially disadvantaged and sidelined (Coleman, 2007; 2011; Fuller, 2014; 2017; Smith, 2011b). As Fuller (2010) concludes, women who take up headships in English secondary schools are "more likely to be single, separated, or divorced; fulfil domestic responsibilities; move location to follow their partner's career; have fewer children; and draw on a wide range of carers to look after sick children than men." (Fuller, 2010, p. 376)

The principles of neoliberalism guide and define the English education system. With its hallmark of high stakes testing and public accountability, neoliberalism remains at the heart of the government's school improvement strategy. However, more recently, concepts of what effective educational leadership looks like have developed into a more relational style of leadership focusing on collaboration and empowerment of staff

rather than top-down approaches (Earley, 2022). A recent spotlight on headteachers' well-being and workload from the unions has also prompted the government to respond and raise governors' and trust boards' awareness of the issue (DfE, 2018; NEU, 2018). This study considers how shifts in the conception of leadership may have reduced organisational barriers that previously deterred, disrupted, or slowed down women's leadership trajectories.

Societal barriers to women's career advancement are well recounted in the literature (Asher, 2012; Bryan, 2020; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). Despite more significant numbers of women in paid employment and legal reforms improving women's rights, traditional expectations that women carry out most caring responsibilities for children and domestic duties remain remarkably resilient (Asher, 2012; Bryan, 2020; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). Expectations of women to be the primary carer hold women back by reducing their available time and emotional energy, unlike their men peers, who can devote themselves to their careers (Asher, 2012; Rich, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic only reinforced an unequal division of labour at home when the burden of homeschooling and childcare fell disproportionately on women (Adams-Prassi et al., 2020). Also, taking time out for maternity leave or caring for children can slow women's career progress and reinforce assumptions that women prioritise family over work (Coleman, 2011; Porter & Fahrenwald, 2022). Women in paid employment can end up being side-lined on the "mommy track" (Porter & Fahrenwald, 2022). Traditional expectations of women influence women's career decisions in education around home and family (Smith, 2016).

In contrast, western traditional social expectations of men are to carry out the instrumental role of the breadwinner (Busbly & Weldon-Johns, 2019; Collins, 2021; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). Traditional expectations of men and women result in women often competing on an unequal playing field in paid employment. However, the legislative framework has begun to reshape traditional expectations of men and women in caring responsibilities; the introduction of paternity leave (Gov.uk, 2003) and shared parental leave and pay (Gov.uk, 2022a) are beginning to set a context where caring roles can be navigated between couples. How caring roles are shared crucially affects women's career trajectories. This study examines the career trajectories of women who have become mothers since 2003 and examines to what extent societal barriers still disrupt women's careers.

This study provides a small and preliminary evidence base to inform future research and policy debates for system leaders interested in improving women's access to and experience of headship and, in this way, contributes to the debate on the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in secondary headship in England.

Definitions: Leadership, Gender, and Work-Life Balance

Leadership, gender, and work-life balance are key concepts in this study. Below is an elaboration drawing on feminist and post-structuralist theories of their definitions as employed in this study.

Educational Leadership

Leadership is a complex phenomenon. The literature on defining educational leadership, drawing upon a range of theoretical perspectives, is extensive (Earley, 2022; Day et al., 2009; Leithwood, 2019; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Leadership is understood differently depending on the context, culture, purpose, geography, and history (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022).

The neoliberal education policy technologies of market, management, and performativity have heavily influenced the enactment of leadership in English schools and who should be a leader (Ball, 2003; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). The technology of performativity means the performances of leaders serve as a measure of productivity or 'moments of promotion or inspection' (Ball, 2003, p. 216). Performativity acts as a mode of regulation employing judgements and incentives based on rewards and sanctions (Ball, 2003). Ball (2003) suggests that performativity has required leaders to adopt new identities, interactions, and values. The technologies have introduced new ethical systems based on institutional self-interest, competition, and performative worth (Ball, 2003). The ethics of performance and competition have replaced previous ethics of cooperation and professional judgement (Ball, 2003).

Neoliberal policy technologies and associated ethical systems have shaped the dominant positional notion of leadership and who should be a leader in England (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Society has long positioned men as agentic, ambitious, dominant, forceful, and risk taking, characteristics synonymous with a successful leader within these new ethical systems (Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Eagly, 2005; Koenig et al., 2011). In contrast, women are associated with being more communal and considerate, which opposes a successful leader's ideal characteristics. As a result, critical feminists challenge this positional notion of leadership, arguing that leadership defined on 'performativity' benefits men rather than women (Watson, 2016). In a system that defines leadership on 'performativity,' women must change to perform according to the new ethical systems rather than systems being transformed to enable women to develop (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022).

Feminist scholarship starts with a definition of leadership that is transformational to both men's and women's leadership, which does not confine leadership to positions of authority (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Although the definition of leadership in this research is restricted to exploring positional leadership within schools, a more relational definition of leadership is adopted. This research explores personal and professional factors that enable women to lead, rather than only focusing on leadership development, which is mainly linked to instrumental learning based on technical skills that shape how work is done (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). In addition, this research challenges earlier scholarship (Hall, 1993; Skrla & Young, 2003) concerning whether women have a distinct leadership style. Women may prefer a style that prioritises relational engagement, but due to differing priorities that differ from the

'performative' man (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). 'Feminine' and 'masculine' leadership styles can be enacted by men and women headteachers (Torrence et al., 2017). Gendered leadership is more fluid than earlier research suggested that examined the differences in leadership styles of men and women (Fuller, 2010).

Furthermore, recent educational leadership scholarship is moving away from the neoliberal discourse to define leadership as influencing rather than holding authority over others (Earley, 2022; Lee, 2021), transformational, learning-centred, and distributed (Earley, 2022; Harris & DeFlammis, 2016). This research, framed within a feminist discourse, draws upon current educational leadership research theory and recognises leadership as the social practice of influence; Northouse (2009) defines leadership as a "process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal." (p. 3)

Gender

Gender is pervasive and fundamentally structures our lives (Hines, 2019). However, gender is challenging to define (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022), complicated by the complex relationship between sex, biological characteristics, and gender, which addresses social and cultural factors (Hines, 2019). This research subscribes to Butler's theory that describes gender as performative, something that people do and express in diverse ways; gender identity is not fixed by biology but shifts according to social and cultural norms and conventions (Butler, 1993). Traditionally, gender identity has been aligned to the person's sex they are assigned at birth, producing binary concepts of gender: woman and man. However, in recent years, terms such as 'gender

fluid' or 'gender flux' have become more common, and the concept that gender is non-binary more prevalent (Hines, 2019).

Research on gender and educational leadership focuses almost entirely on women, excluding men and non-binary individuals (Moorosi, 2019; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Also, in the realm of the family, practical roles remain socially constructed according to sex categories, and so binary concepts of gender are reinforced (Meeussen et al., 2016). Therefore, though recognising that gender does include non-binary, men and women, the research is underpinned by women and men binaries reflective of the current field of educational leadership research (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022) and the resilience of gender binaries within family structures. The binary conception of gender does need to be challenged going forward; however, the strength of this research is that social and cultural differences are considered rather than biological ones; as a result, I purposefully use the terms woman/women and man/men rather than male and female, which refer to biological aspects of a person assigned at birth.

Work-life balance

Since the 1990s, there has been increasing interest in work-family balance in the popular press and scholarly journals. In the last 12 years, the terminology has shifted, with academics and organisations preferring to use the term work-life balance to include employees who are not parents but who desire balance for non-work activities such as sports and study. Understanding what construes work-life balance is

important, as an effective balance leads to growth and development within the work and non-work domains (Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

Although the term is widely adopted, no formal, universally accepted definition exists. Greenhaus et al. (2003) posit a work-life balance is an equality of time or satisfaction across an individual's work/life roles. Therefore, work-family balance was defined as "the extent to which an individual is engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role. We propose three components of work-family balance: time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance." (Greenhaus et al., 2003, p. 513).

Valcour (2007) focuses on the importance of individual satisfaction in the work and family roles and meeting the demands of both successfully: "an overall level of contentment resulting from an assessment of one's degree of success at meeting work and family role demands" (p. 1512). The focus on individual satisfaction overlaps with the recognition that individuals' perceptions of their roles at work and home vary in importance and change over time. For example, life changes, such as the birth of a new baby or promotion at work, prompt individuals to reassess the relative importance of their multiple roles. Greenhaus and Allen (2011) define work-family balance as an evaluation of the extent to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are compatible with their life priorities at a point in time. Finally, work-life balance has also been constructed as the degree of autonomy an individual perceives themselves to have over their various role demands: "Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work." (Fleetwood, 2007, p. 351).

An amalgamation of these definitions is used in this study to define work-life balance as: a consideration of time spent and satisfaction across work and family activities; the degree of control the individual feels they have over the demands of their roles; individual's current preference of role salience (preference of where they would like to spend their time and involvement); and a recognition that individuals' priorities can change to enable growth at work or home.

The Importance of Headteachers

High quality leadership is widely recognised as an integral component of school improvement and significantly influences student outcomes (Day et al., 2009; Earley, 2022; Leithwood, 2019). School leadership is the most significant factor, bar pupils' socioeconomic background and the quality of teaching, on student outcomes (Day et al., 2009). While there has been a growing recognition of the value of distributed leadership (Harris, 2008; Harris & DeFlammis, 2016), headteachers remain central to school leadership (Day et al., 2009).

Research in the last ten years suggests that headteachers influence students' outcomes by establishing a school culture and classroom conditions that develop teaching and learning (Earley, 2022; Robinson, 2011). Day et al. (2009), in their major English study, noted that school leaders have the most significant impact indirectly through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and practices. Seashore's research (2015) demonstrates how school leaders have a major influence on working environments and how stronger teacher working relationships are fostered when influence is shared with teachers, translating into more support for students and

improved outcomes. Leadership matters, but more importantly, 'leadership for learning matters most' (Earley, 2022, p. 84). Leadership for learning requires shared, accountable leadership that creates supportive learning environments where teachers are given the opportunity to develop (Earley, 2022). That successful school leadership promotes a learning culture and encourages teacher leadership is underlined as a priority by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2014 cited in Earley, 2022).

Crisis in Headteacher Recruitment and Retention

The media in recent years has presented the retention and recruitment of headteachers in English schools as a crisis: "English schools 'may face a shortage of 19,000 heads by 2022" (Guardian, 2016); "Exodus of exhausted headteachers predicted in England after pandemic" (Weale, 2020); "Pay attention to our well-being or risk headteacher shortage, teachers tell MPs" (Wingate, 2022). Census data (DfE, 2021a) and the National Association of Headteacher surveys (NAHT) (NAHT, 2021) also point to an impending crisis in headteacher recruitment and retention, predicting a substantial shortage of headteachers in English secondary schools in the future (Lynch & Worth, 2017).

The problem is twofold. Firstly, the system faces the challenge of recruiting headteachers. A survey by the largest union representing English headteachers, the NAHT, indicates the number of assistant and deputy headteachers aspiring to be a headteacher is declining: the number increased from 40% in 2016 to 46% in 2021 with 27% remaining undecided (NAHT, 2021). A survey by Teacher Tapp (2021)

exemplifies the predicted challenges in headteacher recruitment by confirming most teachers do not aspire to headship: only 13% of men and 7% of women state an intention to become a headteacher if they are still working in education in ten years.

The second problem is retaining headteachers. A survey by the Education Policy Institute predicts that 50% of senior leaders expect to leave the profession by the summer of 2025 (Fullard, 2021). Although attitudinal rather than behavioural data, expectations are shown to predict actual behaviour in various other settings (Fullard, 2021). Also, these findings are supported by the NAHT survey, in which 47% of headteachers said they are unlikely to remain in leadership for as long as they had planned (NAHT, 2021).

The challenges of recruiting and retaining leaders have only been exasperated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Fullard, 2021). Emerging research on the impact of the pandemic on teachers' and leaders' workloads and well-being suggests that Covid-19 may increase the number of teachers and leaders leaving the profession (Fullard, 2021). A survey conducted by the Education Policy Institute in 2021 suggests that the likelihood of teachers and senior leaders leaving the profession by 2025 has increased by nearly 50% (Fullard, 2021). The survey, however, only uses participants' attrition expectations and not their actual behaviour. The impact of the pandemic currently is a mixed picture. The number of applicants for teacher training has increased; however, the number of teaching vacancies remains high (Lang & Danechi, 2021).

There is a marked difference in responses between men and women who aspire to secondary headship in the Teacher Tapp survey (2021), which suggests that the

underrepresentation of women in headship will persist without intervention and support. According to the survey (2021), the gender gap has only widened in the last four years. Furthermore, teaching in England is a women dominated profession and schoolwork force data between 2010 and 2019 shows this will remain consistent (Fullard, 2021). The proportion of men in secondary schools has declined yearly since 2010 to 37.1%, explained by fewer men applicants and men more likely to leave the profession (Fullard, 2020). Therefore, encouraging more women into headship is necessary, if only because they numerically comprise the workforce's largest section.

Retaining headteachers and encouraging more senior leaders to step up to headship is crucial to avoid a shortage of good leaders in the future. Increasing the number of women interested in applying for headteacher roles in secondary is an important lever to tackle the crisis.

The English School System

The geographical focus of the research is England. Below is a brief overview of the English school system. Education is compulsory for children until they are 18 (DfE, 2022a). Most children attend a state-funded secondary school between the ages of 11-16 (years 7-11), Key Stages three and four. School based education is optional from 16-18 (years 12 and 13), Key Stage five. Most secondary schools are comprehensive, meaning there are no entrance exams; 95% of pupils attend a comprehensive school (Danechi, 2020). State schools are funded through their local authority or directly from central government. Local authority-maintained schools or community schools are funded by the local authority, part of local government, that is officially responsible for all public services in an area. Academies or Free Schools are

independent of the local authority and are funded directly from central government (DfE, 2022b). A significant proportion of state-funded schools are faith schools attached to the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church (Greany & Earley, 2022); these can either be maintained or an academy.

Multi-academy Trusts (MAT) were established under the early years of the Labour government, and since 2016 (DfE, 2016a), stand-alone academies have been encouraged to join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). A MAT is a non-profit company with a board and a chief executive officer which runs several academies via a funding agreement with the Secretary for Education (Ofsted, 2019). The MAT becomes the legal entity, which is relinquished by the school and assumes responsibility for the governance and performance of each school in its trust. England has a 'middle tier' consisting of Local Authorities (LA) and MATs, which co-exist to oversee schools and academies (Greany & Earley, 2022). The key difference between the oversight of a LA or MAT is the degree of school autonomy (Greany & McGinity, 2022). A LA maintained school is predominantly autonomous, with its own governing body, budget, and substantive headteacher. In contrast, an academy within a MAT does not exist as a separate organisation and relies on the power the MAT wishes to delegate to its schools. MATs, LA-maintained schools, and standalone academies have evolved alongside each other to create a highly fragmented education system (Greany & Higham, 2018; Greany & McGinity, 2022).

LA maintained schools follow the National Curriculum; however, academies and free schools are exempt from following it. The most recent National Curriculum was introduced in 2014 (DfE, 2014). However, the national assessment framework has had

more influence on schools due to the outcomes of being used to hold schools accountable in league tables (Greany & Earley, 2022). Pupils sit National Standard Assessment Tests at the end of KS2, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) at the end of KS4, and A levels and a range of technical qualifications at the end of KS5.

The English Social Policy Context

Systemic and policy-based actions are highlighted as factors explaining the underrepresentation of women in school leadership (Moorosi, 2019; Torrence et al., 2017). This section outlines the educational and family policy framework within which leaders perform their mothering and leadership, exploring the intersection between government policy, contemporary ideologies of mothering and fathering, and the neoliberal work of school leadership,

Equality legislation

Official English government discourse legitimises gender equity. The Equality Act 2010 (Gov.uk, 2010a) establishes the national legislative framework protecting women's rights to equal employment opportunities and protections at work, removing the most deliberate forms of discrimination against women and their career advancement. The Equality Act (Gov.uk, 2010a) harmonises and clarifies previous anti-discrimination legislation and extends the concept of indirect discrimination to all protected characteristics (Burton, 2014). By explicitly including pregnancy and maternity as protected characteristics, the act offers protection to women choosing to have a family, potentially removing structural barriers to women's careers who have

been disproportionally affected by the discrimination related to having children (Coleman, 2002; Torrence et al., 2017). The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) created under the Equality Act (Gov.uk, 2010a) requires equality considerations to be reflected in public authorities' internal policies and the delivery of public services (EHRC, 2022)

However, the limitations of the Equality Act (Gov.uk, 2010a) mean that the act has done little to address gender inequality and intersectional discrimination in the workplace (Burton, 2014). Crucially, the act does not include measures to tackle 'vertical occupational segregation', which means men are disproportionately represented in higher paid and senior positions and occupations. In contrast, women remain concentrated in lower paying positions and occupations (Burton, 2014). The Act relies on an individualised complaints led enforcement model, which means that individual women must bring claims against an employment tribunal to pursue justice. This model, therefore, is unlikely to achieve change as there is no obligation on the employer to change their organisational structure (Burton, 2014).

Furthermore, the Equality Act (Gov.uk, 2010a) does not address intersectional discrimination. The Act fails to recognise that individuals, such as black women, experience a combination of two societal characteristics, which can interact with one another to disadvantage them more than the sum of their two constituent parts (Burton, 2014). The Conservative led coalition's decision not to implement section 14, allowing claims where discrimination is attributable to a combination of two protected characteristics, means that intersectional discrimination remains unrecognised and unaddressed in English law exacerbating occupational discrimination (Fuller, 2022).

Finally, the Equality Act (Gov.uk, 2010a) does little to challenge the breadwinning/caregiving dichotomy, which continues to hinder women's career trajectories (Burton, 2014). Firstly, in schools, the Act does little to challenge discrimination women can experience due to maternity and pregnancy (Fuller, 2017). The PSED has required all schools to report on the impact of the Equality Act 2010 and decision-making on nine protected characteristics. Schools are required to publish compliance with the equality duty. However, Fuller's (2017) research shows how schools have not demonstrably referred to maternity and pregnancy characteristics that disproportionally affect women. Furthermore, the Equality Act 2010 does not include paternity as a protective characteristic, which leaves fathers vulnerable to discrimination at work and increases fathers' reluctance to take up shared parental leave (Birkett & Forbes, 2018). In countries like Sweden and Norway, where parental leave is shared more equally between men and women, women are represented more equally in the workplace (Asher, 2012).

Although official government discourse in the PSED authorises gender equality in schools, its omissions mean that, in practice, women remain disproportionally affected by societal discourses on parenting and mothering (O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020). The omission of paternity as a protected characteristic reflects the enduring expectation of the mother as the caregiver rather than the father (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019; Collins, 2021; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020) and the lack of emphasis on school reporting on the characteristics of maternity and pregnancy demonstrate once more entrenched expectations about the role of women in parenting (Fuller, 2017).

Educational policy

Understanding English educational policy over the last 35 years is crucial to exploring the context in which participating leaders progress to headship, perform their leadership, and navigate the demands and opportunities of headship to mother their children. The educational context has been primarily shaped by the pressures of globalisation (Greany & Earley, 2022) and the influence of neoliberalism (Ball, 1994; Starr, 2021). Globalisation has raised the importance of education as a vehicle for "enhancing human capital and social mobility" (Greany & Earley, 2022, p. 3). Whereas the expansion of global comparison studies and international league tables such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) have created pressures, nationally, for politicians to continuously drive-up standards of student performance (Barber & Mourshed, 2007)

Efforts to improve standards and comparative performance in English state-funded secondary schools have been heavily influenced by neoliberalism and translated into decades of educational policy based on the principles of 'New Public Management' (NPM) (Hood, 1991). Under NPM in England, the idea of schools as organisations, their structures, and governance have been transformed (Ball, 1994; Starr, 2021), with significant implications for the leaders leading them. The main reforms have diminished Local Authority control of education through academisation and the establishment of Multi-academy Trusts and established centrally set high stakes performance assessments and controlled accountability (Ball, 1994).

Previous research on women headteachers (Coleman, 2002; 2011; Smith, 2011a; Fuller, 2010) explored women leading in LA controlled schools. In contrast, the

majority of leaders in this study are leading in academies (five headteachers lead in LA controlled schools, six headteachers in stand-alone academies/Free Schools, and four headteachers/executive headteachers in a MAT), which reflects the structural changes that have occurred in the English school system in the last twelve years and shift in context leaders lead in. Discussed below in more depth are the features of school organisation, the mechanisms the government implements to achieve high levels of accountability, and the subsequent implications for headteacher workload.

Local Authorities. The changing policy landscape has led to a decline in the role of local authorities. Democratically accountable local authorities historically held responsibility for the strategic oversight of the state school system; however, successive neoliberal reforms have aimed to dismantle the welfare-state education system (Courtney, 2017). The extension of the academies since 2010, funded directly by central government, significantly diminished LA governance and administrative support of schools (Courtney, 2017). Only 22% of secondary schools remain under LA control (DfE, 2021b). There has also been a shift in leadership preparation from local authorities to MATs and teaching alliances (Cliffe et al., 2018). Since the Conservative-led coalition in 2010, the reduction of funding has also limited the number of advisors and further reduced support and training offered to schools and school leaders (Cliffe et al., 2018). Cliffe et al. (2018) highlight that the support for leadership development offered by MATs is at the expense of the LA.

Academisation. The first academies opened under the Education Act 2002 (DfES, 2002). Academies were a major part of Labour's strategy to improve secondary school student outcomes by devolving more power to headteachers. Under the

Conservative led coalition from 2010, a rapid expansion in academisation occurred (Cousins, 2019). Academy freedoms were given to every school under the Academies Act 2010 (DfE, 2010) and have remained a central part of English government plans to raise educational standards in state-funded schools. According to the most recent figures from the Department for Education (DfE), 78% of English secondary schools are academies or free schools (DfE, 2021b). This restructuring has devolved significant powers from the Local Authority (LA) to schools over their budgets, curriculum, term dates, school times, and staffing (DfES, 2002), diminishing LA's funding and authority. The devolution of the power to the academies for headteachers in standalone academies has significantly expanded the role of the headteacher and increased their personal accountability for student outcomes and financial performance (Greany & Higham, 2018).

Establishment of Multi-Academy Trusts. Another significant structural change, more recently, has been the formation of MATs (DfE, 2016a). The purpose of MATs within the broader educational policy framework has lacked a clear strategic direction, which has translated into a contradictory policy framework for their development (Greany & McGinity, 2022). However, the expansion of MATs has been rapid; by March 2020, more than a third of all schools and half of all pupils in England were being taught in a school that was part of a MAT (Greany & McGinity, 2022). MATs can operate from two to forty plus primary and secondary schools over a large geographical area. The establishment of MATs has had significant implications for school leaders: a reduction in headteachers' autonomy, increased scrutiny, and extra layers of leadership.

Reduction in Headteachers' Autonomy. The growth in MATs is a fundamental change in the organisation, structure, and operations of the English school system, reversing the trend of school autonomy with significant implications for school leadership (Greany & McGinity, 2022). The new layers of oversight significantly reduce the autonomy a headteacher can exercise over the running of their school. In a MAT, a school's governance and accountability of finance and student performance becomes the responsibility of the trust and its trustees (Ofsted, 2019). Also, the MAT board chooses how much decision making and what is delegated to schools. Since the DfE has championed standardised practice, encouraging MATs to implement a consistent teaching pedagogy and curriculum (DfE, 2016b), MATs have moved towards standardising their curriculum, exam boards and assessment practices across their schools (Greany & McGinity, 2022; Ark, 2022). Among medium and larger-sized MATs, there is more of a convergence of practice and a greater reliance on central teams among their schools (Greany & McGinity, 2022). Therefore, in some cases, headteachers in a MAT lose their autonomy not only over finance but curriculum, teaching, and assessment practices.

Great variation exists in the autonomy of headteachers within a MAT (Greany & McGinity, 2022). The lack of leadership autonomy emerges as a theme in the research on headteacher recruitment (Johnson, 2021). The degree of autonomy a headteacher perceives themselves as having is associated with higher job satisfaction; over half of school leaders (58%) report greater professional autonomy would make school leadership more attractive (NAHT, 2021).

Increased scrutiny. An academy in a MAT is often under greater accountability and scrutiny than a stand-alone academy or LA maintained school because of the additional scrutiny from the central MAT governing body (Matthews & Ehren, 2022). MATs implement their own accountability systems, in addition to national Ofsted inspections. The degree of ongoing monitoring varies from MAT to MAT; in one established MAT review, visits occur over six times a year (Matthews & Ehren, 2022). Additional monitoring contributes to headteachers' stress and workload(Matthews & Ehren, 2022).

Extra layers of Leadership. New leadership structures have emerged in MATs, which means a headteacher in a medium or large MAT is often subject to new layers of leadership. Often, a headteacher or head of school reports to an executive principal and a regional director, whose role is to offer support and hold them accountable. Above the regional director is the academy governing board and CEO. The new layers of leadership have created new opportunities for leadership progression, which may help retain quality leaders.

The layers of leadership in a MAT can offer greater support for school leaders. Headteachers often have an executive headteacher above them to offer advice. Also, the support and challenge that MATs can offer through collaboration across the network can have positive implications for headteacher workload and sometimes may compensate for any loss of autonomy (Ofsted, 2019). Finally, MATs, especially larger ones, offer leadership development training (Cliffe et al., 2018).

However, the emergence of these new leadership structures raises questions about the headteacher's and site-based leadership's value, especially as few executive headteachers are women (Fuller, 2017) and CEOs are predominantly men (Belger, 2022). Courtney (2017) suggests that by positioning executive headteachers as system leaders, the neoliberal reform agenda has established new empowered actors in educational leadership; he proposes that CEOs of large academy chains are discursively privileged as system leaders and have greater social capital by accessing political-cultural elite such as ministers. Courtney (2017) suggests these empowered actors are a growing problem for site-based headteachers' agency.

High stakes accountability

The introduction of high stakes accountability has significantly influenced the day-to-day leadership of English secondary schools and contributed to the pressures that participating leaders manage in their specific contexts. The focus on performance measurements in schools dates to the nineteenth century; however, since the 1980s and the introduction of a market in education, a neoliberal choice agenda tied to a neoliberal curriculum agenda means schools function under high levels of accountability (Gewirtz et al., 2021). Performance measures since 1988 have changed significantly (Gewirtz et al., 2021). The purpose is not to go into their evolution here but to explain how the central setting of target metrics and the establishment of an inspection system that monitors progress ensures compliance. The imposition of sanctions for those not performing above the required threshold shapes leadership in English secondary schools and the pressures participating leaders manage.

Performance Measures. England has been at the forefront of holding schools accountable using student test scores in high stakes standardised tests (Leckie & Goldstein, 2018). Since 2016, the headline indicator of school performance has been Progress 8, which replaced the percentage of pupils who achieved 5 A* to C grades (DfE, 2020). Progress 8 aims to measure pupils' progress from the end of primary, using Standard Assessment Test data, to the end of KS4 by measuring pupil achievement across eight GCSEs (DfE, 2020). Although there have been critics of the varying performance measures (Gewirtz, et al., 2021; Matthews & Ehren, 2022) and their influence on the pedagogical and curriculum decisions made in schools, the most controversial aspect has been their high profile publication in school league tables to promote parental choice (Leckie & Goldstein, 2018).

The purpose of publishing performance data has been to facilitate the quasi market in education by informing parental school choice (Gewirtz et al., 2021). Government discourse suggests publishing performance data exerts leverage in raising standards and promoting social equality (Matthews & Ehren, 2022). However, league tables have been criticised for shaming schools which serve the most economically disadvantaged communities, who regularly dominate the bottom of the tables, whilst celebrating schools whose population is predominantly high attaining middle class students (Leckie & Goldstein, 2018). While the current Progress 8 measure ignores students' backgrounds, the accountability measure is seen as punishing the wrong schools (Leckie & Goldstein, 2018). A school placed low in the league tables faces the challenge of being labelled as 'failing', increasing pressure on attracting pupils and quality staff (Coughlan, 2018). Labelling schools as 'failing' affects teachers' and leaders' morale, confidence, and retention (Coughlan, 2018). As parents choose to

send their children to other schools, even relocating to do so, 'failing' schools experience a drop in pupil numbers and funding (Leckie & Goldstein, 2018). Schools can swiftly face a challenging downward cycle (Coughlan, 2018). The incumbent pressures on headteachers in 'failing' schools have been identified as reasons for a fall in headteacher retention since 2012 (Johnson, 2021). Many participating headteachers work in schools serving economically disadvantaged students and work within a context disproportionately influenced by performance measures.

Ofsted. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), established by the Education (Schools) Act 1992 (DfE, 1992), expanded in 2007 to include children's services, monitors state schools and ensures compliance, including sanctions for those deemed to be not performing above the required threshold (Ofsted, 2022a). Ofsted is an independent non-ministerial government department reporting directly to Parliament and is responsible for inspecting and regulating education for all ages services that care for children. Inspections of secondary schools are currently required to report on the quality of the teaching, leadership, personal development, and behaviour and safety of students. Under the current inspection framework, schools are graded in one of four categories: Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement (RI), and Inadequate (Ofsted, 2022b).

Like league tables, Ofsted negatively impacts schools serving economically disadvantaged areas (Goddard, 2018). Ofsted inspectors are criticised for not considering the contextual challenges a school faces (Goddard, 2018), so a disproportionate number of schools serving urban disadvantaged communities are awarded RI or inadequate. Inspection reports send important messages to prospective

parents and staff, influencing their school choices with significant consequences for schools (Lepkowska, 2014). A school placed into the category of 'Inadequate' is deemed as 'failing', which means that the school, if governed by a Local Authority, must become an academy (DfE, 2022b). Crucially, inspections can weigh considerable pressure on headteachers; if a school is judged 'inadequate', senior managers, including the headteacher, can be dismissed (Lepkowska, 2014). Schools judged to be RI and Inadequate can see student numbers fall and experience problems retaining and recruiting high quality staff (Matthews & Ehren, 2022; Goddard, 2018). Judging a school as RI or inadequate can entrench a cycle of inequality (Goddard, 2018).

The inspection framework has implications for headteacher workload. Ongoing framework reform has added strain on leaders by requiring constant retraining and adaptations of their leadership and school priorities to each successive framework (Matthews & Ehren, 2022). School inspection frameworks have radically changed since 1992 (Matthews & Ehren, 2022). The Ofsted category a school is placed in influences teachers' and leaders' workload. Teachers and leaders working in schools in Ofsted Category RI or inadequate report working longer working hours than their colleagues in Good or Outstanding schools: 40% of teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders report that workload is a very serious problem in comparison to 27% in Good schools and 29% in Outstanding schools (Walker et al., 2019). In addition, there is a notable difference in attitudes towards support with work-life balance and well-being between schools in different categories: Only 29% of senior leaders report their manager is considerate of their life outside of school, and 17% that the governing body

supports their well-being in comparison to 43% and 26% working in 'Outstanding schools' (Walker et al., 2019).

Reflections on Educational Policy

The reorganisation of English school system and the introduction of high stakes accountability have had significant implications for headteacher workload and responsibilities. The consequences have been a downward spiral in headteacher morale, presenting problems in retaining school leaders and making the role seem unattractive to ambitious teachers (NAHT, 2021). Leaders' workload in schools deemed 'failing' is of serious concern (Matthews & Ehren, 2022; Goddard, 2018). The increasing demands on headteachers have implications for women, especially for women who are or wish to be mothers. Furthermore, the growth of MATs and an increasing lack of autonomy for site-based headteachers could also be especially relevant to women, who are significantly underrepresented at an executive level (Fuller, 2017).

The questions raised for this study are: How do women headteachers manage the time and emotional demands of mothering whilst leading in a high stakes accountability system? What can be learned from this sample of women leaders to inform policy, better support leaders managing long working hours, and achieve a sustainable work-life balance?

Family Policy

Societal barriers remain for mothers wishing to pursue professional careers, shaped by structural factors like family policy (Norman, 2017). Family policy refers to the policies affecting directly or indirectly families' lives. Comparison between differing welfare states demonstrates how family policy can facilitate women's autonomy and economic independence from the family. Countries at the top of the Gender Equality Index (EIGE, 2022) prioritise the policy instruments of high levels of public spending, provision of formal childcare, and shared parental leave. A comparison with Denmark highlights how government policy can remove or reinforce structural barriers to women's equality and suggests a direction for future reform in England to support more women into headship.

The various instruments of Labour and Conservative led coalition policies, such as maternity leave after birth, shared parental leave, and family-friendly working arrangements, are outlined below. Since 1997, English governments' policies have attempted to support women's careers by minimising the impact of having children and giving more attention to men's roles as fathers (Banister & Kerrane, 2022). Participating leaders have navigated their careers and families within the context created by these policy reforms. An analysis of the policy framework is crucial in understanding how they perform their leadership and mothering.

Organised Childcare. Organised childcare is an important policy instrument to facilitate women's careers, practically and discursively. In England, childcare provision is regionally diverse, and childcare providers offering less than 30 hours are the most prevalent (Greve & Wiz, 2020). Low coverage of organised childcare discursively and practically supports a one full-time, one part-time model, which, combined with societal

expectations of women as the main carer, disadvantages women's careers (Greve & Wiz, 2020).

In contrast, in Denmark, most children below the age of three are covered by formal childcare, with almost all providers offering more than 30 hours, and coverage rates from three years to minimum compulsory school age are also nearly universal (Greve & Wiz, 2020). Denmark's policy on organised childcare not only practically better suits a dual full-time earner model regardless of children's age but discursively reinforces expectations of a dual earner model. The discursive and practical reinforcement of the dual earner model challenges gendered norms which confine women to the home (Greve & Wiz, 2020).

Statutory Leave. The Labour government reformed maternity leave by extending the statutory entitlement: 18 weeks in 1999, 26 weeks in 2006 and 52 weeks in 2006. In 2003, two weeks paternity leave was introduced, paid at a statutory rate unless enhanced by the employer (Gov.uk, 2022b). Although maternity and paternity leave are important instruments to support parenting, a long maternity leave reinforces an essentialist gender binary discourse by reinforcing the women caregiver model. Furthermore, discursively calling leave, maternity and paternity rather than parental leave reinforces traditional gendered norms of parenting.

In contrast, in Denmark, all three public parental leave programmes allow for 18 weeks paid for the mother, two weeks for the father, and 32 weeks for the parents to split (Greve & Wiz, 2020). This model facilitates more gender egalitarian parenting, discursively by avoiding binary gendered language and practically by providing paid

reserved leave for both mothers and fathers. Research demonstrates the importance of leave being reserved and paid for men to take up leave following the birth of their child (Banister & Kerrane, 2022). In countries such as Sweden and Iceland, where there is non-transferrable full paid leave for fathers', uptake is 90% (Strand, 2018).

In 2015, the Conservative led coalition's introduction of shared Parental Leave (SPL) (Gov.uk, 2022a) based on countries such as Denmark and Sweden intended to encourage a more gender egalitarian caregiver model by reducing the amount of time women spent out of the employment market (Gov.uk, 2018). SPL means that parents can share up to 50 weeks and up to 37 weeks of pay between them (Gov.uk, 2022a). However, in reality the changes have been insignificant (Banister & Kerrane, 2022). The Trade Union Congress (TUC) and campaigners such as Maternity Action have heavily criticised the policy (Dunstan, 2021; Topping, 2021). Firstly, the take up remains low (Birkett & Forbes, 2018; Topping, 2021). According to the Government, whose numbers have been criticised for overestimating the proportion of men taking up SPL (Dunstan, 2021), only-8% of men have taken up their entitlement (Scully, 2021).

The primary reason for the low take-up has been financial. The leave taken by the co-parent under the current scheme, unless enhanced by the company, is unpaid. The most men get under the current scheme is £152 a week. So, there is a strong financial argument to deter men from taking up SPL. Research from Birmingham University (2018) suggests there are other barriers: organisational (discriminatory workplace cultures), traditional normative parental identities, and the maternal transfer mechanism (mother has to 'gift' fathers their leave). Bannister and Kerrane (2022)

argue in line with previous research (Moss & O'Brien, 2019) that SPL's maternal transfer design prevents the policy from unsettling the double/care burden women face. The consequence is that the SPL policy in England has done little to change traditional gendered expectations and the role of parents (Banister & Kerrane, 2022).

Flexible Working. Flexible working hours are one of the most important measures for balancing work and family life (Greve & Wiz, 2020). Flexible working currently describes any working pattern different from the standardised one. Flexible working may include changing from full-time to part-time working or working from home or remotely for all or part of the time. (CitizensAdvice, 2023). The legislation contained in the Employment Act 2002 (Gov.uk, 2002) introduced the right for parents of children under six and disabled children under 18 the right to request flexible working and to have their request seriously considered. The purpose of this legislation was to enable conversations between employers about working patterns that meet parents' childcare responsibilities to support parents to remain in work whilst carers of young children. Since 2014, all employees, except agency staff, have the statutory right to request flexible working (Gov.uk, 2014).

In the education sector, employers can refuse requests to alter or reduce hours on the grounds that educational standards may suffer or they will not be able to recruit additional staff. The current practice of flexible working in English Secondary Schools is ad hoc (Gascoigne, 2019). Decisions are discretionary, though schools are advised to refuse only if there is a good reason (DfE, 2022). The complexities involved in timetabling and the shortage of teachers in England often mean requests can be refused in schools (Gascoigne, 2019).

Reflections of Family Policy. Successive English governments since 1997 have attempted to introduce policies to challenge the traditional women caregiver model by encouraging more women into the workplace and more participatory fatherhood. However, practically and discursively, English family policy has not gone far enough to challenge the dominant essentialist gender discourse on parenting. A long maternity leave reinforces the expectation of the mother being the main carer, whilst a lack of public childcare coverage and paid SPL puts the responsibility for childcare on mothers, reinforcing a full-time and part-time carer model (Greve & Wiz, 2020). In these ways, English policy reinforces rather than challenges an essentialist gender discourse, which positions the mother as the main caregiver.

Comparisons with Denmark's family policy highlight how English policies have not gone far enough to create an environment that supports the dual earner model (Greve & Wiz, 2020). The English government needs to invest in family policy and increase institutional pressure to provide high levels of occupational family policy if the state is going to support parents in combining work and family better (Greve & Wiz, 2020). The result of such investment is seen in Denmark in higher levels of gender equality (EIGE, 2022).

The questions raised for this study: How do school leaders and their partners construct parenting to enable mothers to navigate leadership and mothering within a policy framework that does not go far enough to promote equality in parenting and the workplace? What can be learned from women's experiences of this sample to inform family policy to support women better to pursue leadership careers whilst mothering?

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on women who are currently headteachers or executive headteachers whilst mothers of dependant aged children; their career paths, future aspirations, support networks - professional and personal, their family lives, and the opportunities and challenges in performing the roles of headteacher and mother. Features of headship and their career paths are related to current and previous theory and practice regarding educational leadership. Whilst features of motherhood and family life are related to current theory on motherhood. This study produces an in-depth case study detailing the opportunities and challenges of being a mother and headteacher. Gathering and sharing real life and explicit examples of women leading with families is essential to attract the new generation of women leaders (Edge, 2014).

My findings provide a small and preliminary evidence base to inform future research and policy debates for system leaders interested in improving women's access to and experience of headship and, in this way, contribute to the debate on the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in secondary headship in England. Women remain underrepresented in secondary school headship in England (DfE, 2021a) even though the educational attainment of women teachers is equal if not better than their men counterparts; in England, girls routinely outperform boys in GCSEs, A levels and undergraduate degrees (Fuller, 2017). There remains a significant gap between the proportion of women teachers and the proportion of women headteachers (DfE, 2021a; Fuller, 2017). Research has shown that at the current rate of change, women's representation in headship will not equal their representation in the teaching workforce until after 2040 (Ward, 2016). Women are even more severely underrepresented at

executive headteacher level (Fuller, 2017). A recent Teacher Tapp survey (2021) of 6,000 teachers suggests there is unlikely to be a change in this situation with fewer women than men aspiring to headship: men teachers are twice as likely than women to aspire to be headteachers, and the gender gap has widened in the last four years.

The underrepresentation of women is a matter of social injustice (Blackmore, 2022; Fuller, 2017; Torrence et al., 2017) and exposes the urgent need for research, such as this study, to explain the barriers to women achieving headship. Exploring how a group of women interpret and articulate overcoming potential barriers to achieve headship, this study provides role models for a new generation of school leaders. This study draws upon fourth-wave feminism, which is intersectional and inclusive, promotes women's equality in the workplace, and feminist theory of difference, which identifies that women's sociocultural roles necessitate different approaches to career development (Fuller, 2017; 2021).

This study may, at least in part, contribute to the understanding of and solutions for solving the retention and recruitment crisis of headteachers. Women headteachers and executive headteachers are positioned as 'outsiders-within'; as leaders, women headteachers gain knowledge and experience of the dominant men group, however, without the advantages accorded to men. The outsider-within phenomenon places them in a unique position to offer valuable insights into educational leadership, which point to patterns of behaviour that those immersed in the dominant group culture may be unable to recognize (Allen, 1996).

Significance of the Study

Whilst there is an extensive body of knowledge exploring the barriers facing women's leadership careers in education leadership (Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2009; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2011b; Torrence, et al., 2017), and the influence motherhood can have on women's careers (Arendell, 2000; Asher, 2012; Bianchi, 2000; Correll, et al., 2007; O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020) there has been little attention on the intersection between the motherhood and school leadership. Women headteachers, specifically those with younger families, are a cohort of leaders that remain rarely considered within academic research. No previous studies have focused exclusively on English women secondary headteachers who are also mothers.

A distinctive body of findings emerges from the Economic Social Research Council (ERSC) Young Global City Leaders (YGCL) study (Edge, 2014), demonstrating that Generation X (under 42) women leaders are making significant life choices about their family due to their school leadership careers; worried about the sustainability of leadership and parenthood; and, relying heavily on their parents and in-laws to help them manage a young family and their career (Edge, 2014). Whilst no studies have focused exclusively on secondary school leadership and motherhood, Edge's (2014) findings suggest that parenthood plays a significant part in how women experience and manage their careers and decision-making. My research will contribute to this discussion and debate in England (Coleman, 2001; 2002; 2003; 2005a; 2007; 2011; Fuller, 2009; 2010; 2013; 2014; 2016; 2017; Smith, 2011a; 2011b; 2016) which focuses on women's leadership specifically along the lines of gender roles, parenthood, well-being and institutional and policy arrangements that may serve as facilitators and barriers to achieving equality.

Previous educational research has identified the constraints placed by motherhood on women's careers as an influential barrier to women's progression into senior school-level posts (Fuller, 2009; Coleman, 2007). Before the 1990s, women headteachers were often childless and single due to the challenges of performing the dual roles of headteacher and mother (Coleman, 2002). However, since then, the number of headteachers who are mothers has increased (Coleman, 2007). Many often apply for headship once their children have grown up and left home (Coleman, 2007). The fact that many of the leaders in the system have been either mothers of older children or not mothers means that mothering dependent children whilst leading is a rather new and unexplored phenomenon. This points to the way this research is both important and timely. In addition, women are achieving leadership roles at a younger age whilst having children at an older age (Edge, 2014; Office for National Statistics, 2015). Therefore, more than ever before, women are likely to be considering headship whilst considering parenting dependent children. Understanding more about this cohort of leaders' lives, experiences, and ambitions will highlight the policy, structural and organisational support required for women to combine these roles effectively.

Furthermore, previous English studies of women headteachers (Fuller, 2009; Coleman, 2002; 2005; 2007) were conducted during New Labour governments, in a different educational era, in turn, policy landscape. This research assumes and seeks to identify if and how reforms since 2010 are influencing the work of headteachers who are mothers, who, based on Coleman's research (2007), are more likely to experience negative knock-on effects versus those who have few family responsibilities. In addition, changes to paternity leave, which can reduce the burden on the mother and flexible working, potentially present opportunities to working mothers.

Although the data was collected before 2019, emerging findings are that the Covid-19 pandemic has only increased pressure on headteachers (TeacherTapp, 2021), been a particular burden on families (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021), and disproportionately affected women (Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). Understanding how leaders navigate and manage family and professional lives is even more important to retaining headteachers. Crucially, a recent Teacher Tap survey (2021) on headteachers shows that women headteachers are feeling the burden of increased stress even more than their men counterparts: in 2019, 53% of women headteachers and 52% of men headteachers agreed that stress levels were unacceptable; however, in 2021 this had risen to 76% for women headteachers and compared to 45% for men headteachers. Understanding more about how women headteachers experience leadership and effective strategies that help to manage the demands of the role are important to support and inform the retention of these headteachers.

Research Questions

The primary guiding question for this study is: How do secondary headteachers who are also mothers of dependent children perceive, experience, and manage the challenges and opportunities of headship, family, and personal lives?

Subsidiary research questions drawn from the literature review and support the development of a better understanding of the primary question include:

- Are there patterns in the career trajectories and experiences of secondary women leaders who are mothers?

- How do women headteachers describe their career and leadership experience?

- What are the future aspirations of women secondary headteachers, and how does family influence their aspirations?

- What are the opportunities and challenges of secondary headship for women?

- What opportunities and challenges does motherhood present for secondary headship?

- What strategies do women headteachers employ to manage their work and home?

The subsidiary research questions focus on the three key aspects of this cohort of headteachers' lives: their career journeys to headship and future career aspirations, their experience of school leadership as a mother, and the strategies and support structures they have in place to manage leadership and motherhood.

Structure of the Thesis

The introductory chapter outlines the tensions contributing to the underrepresentation of women at headship in secondary schools to establish the significance and purpose of the study. The structural challenges that English education and family policy present to women who are mothering and leading have been explained. Chapter two, the literature review, expands on the main concepts supporting this research and reviews the research on: motherhood, fatherhood, and the division of domestic duties; women and leadership; and women and educational leadership. Chapter four, the Methodology, describes the methodological approach. Details of the sampling strategy, data collection, and analysis are explained. The central component of

chapter four is an explanation of the theoretical framework framed within a poststructuralist feminist perspective. The findings are divided into three chapters, each chapter presenting the analysis of data on: leaders' career journeys, navigating motherhood and leadership, perceptions and management of work-life balance, and future career aspirations. Chapter six, the discussion, answers the research questions, examining the findings with reference to the current research reviewed in the literature review. Chapter seven, the conclusion, summarises the study's main findings and discusses their contribution to knowledge and practice, considering a gendered, school leadership, English perspective. The conclusion also presents the study's limitations, identifies recommendations for policymakers, and highlights areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study explores English secondary head and executive headteachers' negotiation of school leadership and family and is situated in the more general fields of motherhood and employment. Although there is a body of research examining the careers of women secondary school headteachers (Coleman, 2007; Fuller, 2009; Fuller, 2014; Fuller, 2013; Moorosi et al., 2018; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a) and a body of research on how motherhood influences the careers of women (Arendell, 2000; Beigi et al., 2017; Correll et al., 2007; O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020) there is little research evidence specifically focused on the working and family lives of headteachers who are mothers. Work-family researchers often ignore women who have been successful in their careers (Begi et al., 2017). Accordingly, the main objective of this chapter is to gain a deeper understanding of studies on motherhood and employment, and women and educational leadership during the last two decades, to develop an original and valuable understanding of the current work conditions and experiences of mothers in secondary headship to inform revisions to both theory and policy.

The development of evidence-based knowledge about headteachers who are mothers is necessary to understand why there are not more women headteachers in secondary schools. This, in turn, will enable the DfE and the National College of Teaching and Leadership to gain insight into the headteacher recruitment crisis and support a more equal representation of women at headship level in England's secondary schools.

Several methodological decisions were established before the exploration, review, and writing process. Two leading ideas shaped the review of research: 1) women

secondary school headteachers' careers and 2) motherhood and employment. Based on my initial reading of Coleman's (2001; 2002; 2005a) seminal research and Fuller's (2013; 2014) subsequent studies, a series of keywords and combinations of keywords were created. These included: women, headteachers, principals, secondary school, career; women headteachers, principals, secondary school, leadership career; women headteachers, principals, secondary school, leadership barriers; women, headteachers, mothers, school leadership; women, headship, motherhood. The terms headteachers and principals were used to search the literature as they had been used interchangeably in England since the extension of the academy programme in 2010. Furthermore, the term principal would capture literature from America, where the term principal is exclusively used. The second focus of the review was motherhood and employment. Rich's (2021) and Hochschild & Machung's (1989) influential work guided the choice of the keywords to locate the literature: motherhood, discrimination; motherhood opportunities; motherhood, domestic labour, employment; fatherhood, domestic labour, employment; leader, motherhood; leadership diversity.

A consistent criterion was applied to select the documents. The publication search considered publications from 1999-2022, written in English, peer-reviewed articles, books, doctoral thesis, and government-funded and produced reports. All searches using Google Scholar and the University College London 'Explore' search engine, which allowed access to extensive physical and digital catalogues, including the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), ProQuest Education Database, Educational Administration Abstracts, British Education Index (BEI), OECD library, SCOPUS, and Web of Science. Publications were chosen because of their relevance and their importance to previous researchers. Publications researched from England

were prioritised because of their immediate relevance. Those from North America were also used due to the cultural and educational policy similarities to England. Sources published from 2010 provided the most relevant research and discussions on the topic. However, a subset of the referenced literature was published before 2010. These articles provide historical context for theories and frameworks while representing the breadth of the topic.

The research by academics on gender during the last several decades has focused on gender differences between men and women workers in a wide variety of personal and organisational aspects, including gender differences among men and women leaders (Oplatka, 2016). Of the many bodies of gender research in the organisation literature, two are most relevant to this study: the barriers to women's advancement and the career experiences of women leaders.

The chapter is divided into two sections: Motherhood: Maternal Theory and the Labour of Motherhood; and Women, Leadership, and Headship. The first section reviews the research on how the dominant construct of motherhood influences women's labour in the home and waged markets. Although a nongendered parental discourse that embraces the complexity of each caregiving parent, regardless of gender, is required to promote equality, the word parent denies the gender imbalance that currently exists (Ennis, 2020). Mother/motherhood and father/fatherhood currently more accurately describe most acts of parenting, reflecting the inequity in the division of labour in the home (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019; Collins, 2021; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). Finally, the terms mother/motherhood and father/fatherhood are used because this study's evidence base employs essentially binary conceptions of parenting.

Secondly, an analysis of the gender in educational literature is presented, focusing particularly on the research on secondary school leadership (Coleman, 2007; Fuller, 2014; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016). The literature has predominantly focused on gendered assumptions of leadership and leaders, specifically the structural, personal, and school level challenges to recruiting more women headteachers (Coleman, 2007; Fuller, 2014; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016).

Each section ends with a conclusion summarising the main points and identifying implications for this study.

Motherhood: Maternal Theory and the Labour of Motherhood

The review begins by exploring the research on maternal theory, examining the hegemonic model of mothering in England of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996; Vernier et al., 2022) and its embedded discourse of maternal guilt. Following the research related to the labour of motherhood is examined, and how the resilience of essential binary constructs continues to influence the division of labour in the home and influence women's participation in the waged labour market (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019; Collins, 2021; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). The resilience of the 'maternal wall' (Swiss & Walker, 1993) and wage penalty (Eagly and Carli, 2007) are examined. The literature exploring how family policy and equality legislation are beginning to bring about changes to traditional constructs and the potentiality of motherhood is also considered (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019; Gov.uk, 2022a; O'Reilly, 2020) and the labour of fatherhood is examined within this policy context.

Maternal Theory

Motherhood has developed over the last 40 years into an established scholarly field of inquiry (O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020). The areas of research pertinent to this study specifically relate to the maternal theory of intensive mothering and motherhood and work.

As the quote from Dally (1982) highlights, motherhood is socially constructed: "There have always been mothers, but motherhood was invented. Each subsequent age and society have defined it in its own terms and imposed its own restrictions and expectations on mothers" (p. 1). The oppressive dimensions of motherhood have been the focus of feminist research (O'Reilly, 2020). Intensive mothering is the model of motherhood understood as a 'normative standard' in England, America and amongst other English-speaking and high-income countries (Hays, 1996; Vernier et al., 2022). The discourse of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s (O'Reilly, 2020). Intensive mothering emphasises the need for the mother to identify closely with the child's emotional, psychological, and cognitive needs (Hays, 1996). Intensive mothering requires mothers to be ever present in their children's lives and prioritise the needs of their children above all other activities (Bianchi et al., 2012). Intensive mothering is expert guided, and mothers must first educate themselves on specialist advice and consult professionals. If problems arise, the methods recommended, such as the right toys and learning experiences, are often expensive (Vernier et al., 2022). As a result, highly educated women are more closely attuned to intensive mothering (Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2020). This model of motherhood deems

motherhood to be innate in women, and only the birth mothers have such deep seated drive.

Intensive mothering requires a significant amount of time, energy, and money. Even though mothers today have more labour saving devices, they spend more time and energy on their children than their mothers did in the 1960s (Eagly & Carli, 2007; SIRC, 2011; O'Reilly, 2020) Between 1975 and 2010, the time women spent with their children almost doubled (Bianchi et al., 2012). Unlike the majority of mothers in the 1960s and 1970s, mothers today who practice intensive mothering are employed full-time (O'Reilly, 2020). As Fox remarked:

> Expectations about the work needed to raise a child successfully have escalated at a dizzy rate; the bar is now sky high. Aside from the weighty prescriptions about the nutrition essential to babies' and children's physical health, and the sensitivity required for their emotional health, warnings about the need for intellectual stimulation necessary for developmental progress are directed at mothers. (Fox, 2006, p. 237)

Intensive mothering comes at a personal cost to women in terms of their own well-being and careers. The investment of time intensive mothering requires can leave women 'shattered' (Asher, 2012) and emotionally and physically exhausted. Hay's (1996) analysis of intensive mothering concludes that the practice helps the exclusion of women from positions of authority by restricting the time and energy available for their careers. O'Reilly (2020) concurs that intensive mothering as an ideological construct makes work and motherhood incompatible, giving rise to self-doubt and diminishing women's confidence as mothers and workers. O'Reilly (2020) asserts that intensive mothering, by establishing a standard no mother can achieve, positions mothers in their own eyes and through their peers as failures and so regulates their

behaviour by discouraging them from going for promotion or encouraging them to leave paid employment. The discourse of intensive mothering oppresses women by dictating that only the biological mother can fulfil the child's needs and that the child's needs must always come first, denying the mother's own selfhood (O'Reilly, 2020).

The reasons why women, members of a disadvantaged group, approve a construction of motherhood that adversely affects them have been explained using self-justification theory to suggest that intensive mothering is "a system justifying ideology which imbues the gender status quo with validity and legitimacy." (Vernier et al., 2022, p. 2). Vernier et al. (2022) propose that intensive mothering allows mothers to feel satisfied with their situation by allowing them to convert what is to what should be. Also, in line with a social identity perspective, intensive mothering may serve as a strategy mothers use to gain a positive social identity (Vernier et al., 2022). Furthermore, intensive mothering as an ideology encompassing knowledge as well as moral contentions, which regulates individual behaviour and, in turn, reinforces hegemonic power, should be considered an apparatus in the Foucauldian perspective (Vernier, et al., 2022). A channel where hegemonic power pervades society is the media. Examining child-rearing manuals (Hays, 1996) and, more recently, social media demonstrate how the intensive mothering discourse permeates society to regulate mothers' behaviours (Vernier et al., 2022). Increasingly, parents are using social media, online tools that promote social interaction between people, as a source of parenting information (Dworkin et al., 2018). Vernier et al. (2022) research demonstrates that 'mommy blogs' provide normative cultural models of parenting, which endorse rather than challenge intensive mothering, compelling women to adopt the practice further.

The model of Intensive mothering perceives fathers to be incompetent, marginalising their role (Asher, 2012; Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2020). Fairclough (2020) shows even in professional couples who commit to an equal division of care, because of the influence to parent 'intensively', the mother has more caring demands made on her, which complicates paternal involvement. Intensive mothering accentuates existing divisions and potentially divides even egalitarian couples along more traditional lines (Fairclough, 2020; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020).

However, intensive mothering has been challenged, and alternative discourses have emerged from feminist scholarship to allow mothers their selfhood and power (O'Reilly, 2020; Rich, 2021). Rich uses the term 'courageous' to define a non-patriarchal (Rich, 2021) practice of mothering. O'Reilly uses the term 'empowered' mothering (O'Reilly, 2020). Both theories consider how women resist patriarchal motherhood to achieve an experience of mothering that gives them control over their choices and identity, and confers agency, autonomy, and authority denied to them by patriarchal motherhood (O'Reilly, 2020). This more empowered discourse includes a multitude of mothering practices, including co-mothering of queer households (O'Reilly, 2020) and redefines mother work as a site of power that can affect social change through feminist mothering (Green, 2020).

Maternal guilt. The inability to live up to the expectations of a 'good mother' embedded in the discourse of intensive mothering leaves many women, especially working women, feeling guilty (Collins, 2021; O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020; Rich, 2021). The dilemma of meeting the requirements of a 'good mother' as well as juggling the responsibilities of paid work is one of the reasons why maternal guilt is one of the

most consistent research findings on motherhood (Collins, 2021). A mother's time at work is time spent away from parenting, which engenders guilt attached to work (Hays, 1996). The experience of guilt is not gender neutral (Glavin et al., 2011) but tends to be more prevalent for mothers than fathers (Collins, 2021). Even when mothers are positive about their work and childcare options, they expect guilt as a by-product of mothering (McDonald et al., 2005). Maternal guilt involves mothers feeling they are not doing enough for their children to continuously fear that they are bad mothers (O'Reilly, 2020; Rich, 2021). Collins (2021), in her study of white middle class full-time working mothers across different Western cultural and political contexts, found that maternal guilt transcends the national context. Despite very different policy contexts, mothers in all countries express concern about insufficient time with their children and the quality of available daycare (Collins, 2021).

Maternal guilt then often shapes mother's career decisions, aspirations, scheduling negotiations, parenting style and perpetuates a gender system where women are the primary caregivers, fuelling an unequal gender division of labour (Collins, 2021; Rich, 2021). As Aarntzen et al. (2019) assert, "guilt may limit women in their work and family choices and straitjacket mothers into complying with gender norms in which they prioritise caregiving tasks over work" (p. 14). Maternal guilt is also associated with lower maternal well-being; mothers who express feeling guilt report lower self-efficacy and greater anxiety (Aarntzen et al., 2019; Borelli et al., 2017; Glavin et al., 2011). Also, maternal guilt can encourage mothers to limit their own personal leisure time to spend time with their children at the expense of their well-being (Aarntzen et al., 2019).

Maternal guilt is embedded in the discourse of intensive parenting. So, although family policies can diminish or intensify mothers' guilt, policy shifts are an insufficient solution to ease mothers' guilt without simultaneous cultural shifts in the meaning of motherhood (Collins, 2021). Reshaping mothering discourses in specific cultural contexts and reinforcing discourse by progressive, egalitarian work-family policies may lessen the regulatory effects (Collins, 2021).

The Labour of Motherhood

The 'labour of motherhood' includes the labour in the home, including cooking, cleaning, and caring, and 'mothers as particular kinds of workers in the waged labour markets (Bryan, 2020). The work of motherhood is dynamic, and its waged and unwaged labours are experienced, performed, and compensated for according to the patterns of inequality and hierarchy that characterise specific cultural contexts (Bryan, 2020); therefore, the review will focus primarily on literature from England.

Despite the long history of women's integration into the waged labour market, persistent trends influence women's positioning and experience of paid employment (Bryan, 2020). Firstly, women remain responsible for domestic labour in the home despite involvement in paid employment. (Asher, 2012; Bryan, 2020; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). Secondly, women continue to find work in the labour market that designates service, accommodation, and care, demonstrating gendered assumptions determine the form of work available to women (Bryan, 2020). Finally, women's wages continue to be relatively lower than their men counterparts (Gov.uk, 2020; Bryan, 2020) as women continue to fill more part-time roles and occupy

fewer leadership positions, explaining the persistence of the gender pay gap (ONS, 2020a).

Labour in the Home. Regardless of women's status within waged labour markets, the literature suggests little change in the division in the division of labour in the home; women remain primarily responsible for domestic labour (Asher, 2012; Bryan, 2020; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). The 'second shift', a term used to describe a woman's unpaid work in the home after a full day of paid work, used in the 1980s by Hothschild (1989), appears to retain its resilience as a concept. Recent research (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021) from Iceland, a country at the top of the Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2022), shows the strength of strong gender norms by analysing how the Covid-19 pandemic revealed and exaggerated expectations towards mothers. Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir (2021) report that mothers face gendered realities and inequality regardless of the dominant discourse; they perform a greater proportion of the childcare and household labour. Adams-Prassi et al. (2020) and Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya (2020) suggest the experiences of mothers and fathers during the pandemic have amplified already existing gender imbalances and divisions within families. Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir (2021) conclude that by forcing families into their homes, the pandemic highlighted existing gendered performances and social structures that previously mothers and fathers were too busy to acknowledge or found difficult to accept.

An unequal division of household labour has significant implications for women's career advancement. Firstly, bearing the burden of domestic labour means that working women, unlike men, work a double day, diminishing their energies and time

for their careers and impacting their well-being. Furthermore, women step back from their careers due to the challenges of managing the demands of family and work (Ely et al., 2014; Harkness et al., 2019). Vernier & Vala conclude that "there are distinct limits to the scope for reducing gender wage inequality in the labour market as long as women bear the major responsibility for household duties and childcare" (2018, p. 965). The challenges are intensified by a lack of employer support for parents and affordable, quality childcare (Summer, 2022; Ofsted, 2020). For mothers of disabled children, these challenges are intensified, and the high demands of care and scarcity of appropriate and affordable childcare for disabled children exclude mothers from the labour market and position them as a burden on the state (Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2017). As a result of managing household duties and childcare means that women are more likely to be employed in low-paid jobs, not take on management positions, and work part-time (Bryan, 2020; Vernier & Vala, 2018).

Emotional Labour. Emotional labour in the context of parenting is the work a parent does to tend to their family's emotional well-being (Curran et al., 2015). Similar to other aspects of the labour of motherhood, research focuses on the division of emotional labour in heteronormative couples. There is a paucity of research on same-sex couples and parenting. Mothers perform a disproportionate share of the emotional labour (Curran et al., 2015; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). Many fathers who embrace fathering rely on the mother for emotional guidance in parenting (Ennis, 2020), and research suggests that young children tend to seek more help and attention from their mothers than their fathers (Collins, 2021). The emotional labour a mother carries out is not limited to their children and also involves other relatives, including looking after the emotional well-being of their in-laws and parents (Curran et al., 2015;

Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). The burden of emotional labour contributes to the difficulties mother can encounter contending with family lives and work and increase stress and the likelihood of burnout (Asher, 2012; Curran et al., 2015; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021)

Cognitive Labour. Robertson et al. (2019) suggest that cognitive labour or mental work is the fourth construct of family work. The three other constructs are housework, childcare, and emotional labour. When referring to the second shift, researchers often only refer to domestic duties and household strategy as physical acts such as cleaning, cooking, and shopping, which are easier to quantify (Daminger, 2019). Robertson et al. (2019) describe cognitive labour as the aspect of family work, which "includes the invisible mental work related to managerial and family caregiving responsibilities" (p. 185). This definition concurs with Daminger's, who describes cognitive labour as the thinking, planning, and decision-making involved in running a household and anticipating children's physical, emotional, and social needs (Daminger, 2019). Due to the difficulties of defining the non-physical aspects of managing a household, they have often been overlooked and ill-defined (Daminger, 2019).

Daminger (2019) defines and demonstrates that the cognitive component of household management is a potential source of gender inequality at the household level. Cognitive labour cannot be delegated to someone outside the family, and mothers are often the household managers (Daminger, 2019; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Robertson et al., 2019). Women take a larger role in anticipating and meeting children's needs; however, decision-making, the component linked most closely to power and influence the distribution is more equal (Daminger, 2019).

Cognitive labour often goes unnoticed by other family members along with the burden such responsibilities require and can be an ongoing source of stress and distraction from paid work and leisure interests (Daminger, 2019; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). The unequal burden of cognitive labour can often be felt more keenly by high-achieving women due to the nature of their waged employment, which requires high levels of cognitively demanding activities. Experiencing conflict between cognitive labour in the public and private spheres can add to the mental load for mothers' everyday lives (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021).

Even fathers who participate actively in caregiving often do so in a supporting and helping way rather than in the capacity of bearing an equal cognitive load or taking ownership (Kelland et al., 2022; Podnieks, 2016). Studies that exclude cognitive labour are likely to underestimate the gender gap between men and women, especially as the distribution of physical aspects of household management becomes more equal (Daminger, 2019).

Labour in the Waged Market. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU) (European Commission, 2012) contains provisions relating to the promotion of equality between women and men in work and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex. As a former EU member state, England complies with these provisions and continues incorporating them within legislation (Vernier & Vala, 2018). However, a large body of international evidence shows women, in contrast to men, suffer large pay penalties and damage to their career progression following the birth of their children (WorkPlace and Gender Equality Research

Programme, 2019). Confirming the resilience of the maternal wall and wage penalty mothers experience.

Maternal Wall. The maternal wall, a term that emerged in the 1990s, explains the various forms of discrimination experienced by working mothers and mothers seeking employment (Swiss & Walker, 1993). Since then, motherhood has continued to be perceived as culturally incompatible with work, unlike fatherhood, and continues to explain gender discrimination in the workplace (Correll et al., 2007; Neyer & Bernardi, 2011; Vernier & Vala, 2018). Women's socially constructed reproductive roles mean mothers are often unequally positioned in the waged labour market (Bryan, 2020). Vernier and Vala (2018) suggest the small reduction in gender inequalities in the workplace since 2008 is due to prevalent cultural assumptions that women's work threatens the well-being of young children and families. Mothers are also often overlooked for promotion and developmental opportunities because of assumptions that mothers' priorities lie away from work, and mothers have less time to focus on professional development, making them less focused and valuable employees (Bryan, 2020; Collins, 2021; Vernier & Vala, 2018). Workplace and gender equality research demonstrates that the most significant factor in slowing mothers' career progression in England is a lower chance of promotion rather than occupational downgrading (Harkness et al., 2019). In the English education sector, mothers have a lower chance of career progression than in the private sector (Harkness et al., 2019). However, women in the private sector are less likely to return to work at the same level as those in the public sector (Harkness et al., 2019). The result of returning to unfulfilling roles following the birth of their child encourages women to leave their roles; Ely et al. (2014) describe this practice of women as 'mommy-tracked' (Ely et al., 2014).

The influence of the maternal wall has been that women leaders in the public sector are more likely than men to be childless (Coleman, 2007; Lewis, 2018). Also, the maternal wall has been attributed to women making significant choices about family (ONS, 2020b; Romei, 2022). According to ONS data, women in the United Kingdom (UK) choose to have babies later and have fewer or more likely to have no children than women a generation ago. The data shows half of English women by the age of 30 are childless, which contrasts with their mother's generation, who most commonly were 22 when they gave birth (ONS, 2020b; Romei, 2022). This significant shift in women's behaviour has been explained by women achieving higher levels of education and delaying the choice to have children to prioritise their careers (ONS, 2020b; Romei, 2022).

Wage penalty. The term wage penalty describes a mother's wages when they are not equal to their men and women (with no children) counterparts. Eagly and Carli (2007) described, in the USA, the loss of income associated with motherhood as a 'Maternity tax.' The English Government, to address the gender pay gap since 1997, has compelled by law English companies with over 250 employees to report their employees' earnings. Since then, the gap, which measures the difference between average and hourly earnings of men and women, has decreased slightly. However, there has been little or no change in the gap between graduate workers since the 1990s (Francis-Devine, 2022). The gap is explained in a House of Commons Briefing paper by structural factors, including women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, a part-time pay penalty, and occupational segregation (Francis-Devine, 2022). The gender pay gap reflects the continued unequal representation of women

in the highest management paid positions; most recent data shows the gender pay gap is the highest amongst the 40–49-year group, explained by the lower incidence of women moving into those higher paid managerial positions than men (ONS, 2020a). The gender pay gap for women at the top is also great, earning only 77% of what their men counterparts do at the same level (Andrew et al., 2021). Similarly, in education, the gender pay gap is largest at headteacher level (ASCL, NAHT, NGA, & #WomenEd, 2021). Work in English schools has the fifth-highest full-time gender pay gap and the highest part-time gender pay gap (Francis-Devine, 2022).

Analysis by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (FIS) shows that the average earnings of men are almost unaffected by parenthood; however, women's earnings fall sharply when they become parents and stabilise at a much lower level with little growth (Andrew et al., 2021). Even mothers who earn more than their men partners before childbirth are more likely than their partners to reduce their hours after childbirth (Andrew et al., 2021). The widening gap is largely due to women spending less time in full-time work, as part-time work is associated with weaker salary growth, which is especially influential on the earnings of graduate mothers (Andrew et al., 2021; Francis-Devine, 2022). In education, the largest group leaving full-time teaching employment in English schools is women between 35-39. The reasons presented are the challenges of managing workload and family responsibilities (ASCL, NAHT, NGA, & #WomenEd, 2021).

Another factor that may explain the widening gap is the time people spend travelling to work. A wide gender commuting gap develops after the first child's birth, with women choosing to work closer to home than men (Francis-Devine, 2022). Research on

women MPs in Sweden reveals that those with young children are likelier to live closer to Stockholm than those with older children who live further away, suggesting the child's age and location influence whether women stand for office (Folke & Rickne, 2020). A woman working closer to home may not have the same job opportunities that match her skills or with a high-paying employer (Joyce & Norris Keiller, 2018). The gender pay gap may also be exacerbated by employers who can take advantage of the fact that mothers only compare their wage offers to local employers (Joyce & Norris Keiller, 2018). However, the gender pay gap may not be caused by a gender commuting gap; both may arise from women needing more flexible working (Francis-Devine, 2022).

Extreme work model. Since the 1990s, American and British corporate and public sector professionals have worked longer hours (Hewlett & Luce, 2006). Hewlett and Luce (2006) describe how many American professionals work according to an extreme work model. They define an extreme job as one where the individual works more than 60 hours a week (Hewlett & Luce, 2006). Ann Marie Slaughter's high-profile resignation in America in 2012 over increasingly longer working weeks highlighted the challenges of raising a family and pursuing a leadership career based on an extreme work model.

Intensive mothering exists in tension with the normative belief in Western societies of the 'ideal worker' being committed to working 'extreme hours' and unencumbered by other demands (Vernier & Vala, 2018; Williams, 2001). An extreme work model influences mothers more negatively than fathers because long-waged working hours compete with domestic and childcare responsibilities (Hewlett & Luce, 2006; ONS,

2021). Women can personally be more affected because trying to meet the demands of an 'extreme job' and intensive mothering means little time to invest in personal relationships outside of work, which takes a toll on their health and well-being (Bostic & Philipsen, 2010). Women are often expected to make career decisions to accommodate family responsibilities (Ely et al., 2014; Joyce & Norris Keiller, 2018).

Influence of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). An extreme work model has been facilitated by increasingly advanced and affordable ICT, which has changed our connection to work beyond the traditional hours. The spread of smartphones, laptops, and tablets expands where and when work can occur (Hewlett& Luce, 2006; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007). Fenner and Renn (2004), referring to this "technology-assisted supplemental work," argue that ICT has "enabled an anytime-anywhere connectedness of employees to their work" (Fenner & Renn, 2004, p. 184). ICT change the temporal aspects of work as employees are more connected to work beyond the traditional workday and workplace, potentially being contactable at all hours through email (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007). ICT enables greater work-life integration, blurring the boundaries between the two domains more easily (Fenner & Renn, 2004; Hewlett & Luce, 2006; Pollock & Hauseman, 2019). The impact of ICT on working patterns has been associated with increasing work-to-life conflict; however, further evidence needs to be collected to determine the influence of ICT on work-life balance (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007).

ICT has had a major influence on work in English schools; schools are expected to use ICT to improve the education of their students and how professionals work together (Winter et al., 2021). The government's decision to close schools during

Covid-19 has further increased teachers' and school leaders' confidence and engagement with technology (Winter et al., 2021). Covid-19 radically changed teachers' and leaders' practice as education professionals designed online lessons and assessments, communicated, and delivered professional training/meetings online. Pollock & Hauseman (2019) suggest that email communication has transformed the role of headteachers, intensifying their work, increasing working hours, and extending their work beyond the schools.

Technology has the potential to continue to radically change the way we work, facilitating flexible working and working from home, and Covid-19 has helped to enforce this potential (Winter et al., 2021). Further research is needed to understand how headteachers can utilise ICT while protecting their well-being and family/personal life. One of the purposes of this study is to understand better the use of ICT to perform job-related functions during non-work time and the implications of such use for school leaders' work-life balance.

Work-life balance. Time is gendered, and according to Bryson and Deery (2010), time cultures are linked to power and control, which sustain gender inequities in how men and women use and perceive time. Men, on average, have more control over their time outside work than women; women, especially mothers, in contrast, have more claims on their time from family members (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021) and household labour (ONS, 2021). Family obligations and issues related to childcare are also more likely to be included in mothers' working hours than fathers (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). The consequences are that women feel more

rushed in their daily lives (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021) and multi-task (O'Sullivan & Gershuny, 2018).

Mothers, unlike fathers often driven to sacrifice leisure time. Even part-time working mothers' leisure time is scattered, while men have more unbroken leisure time (Ennis, 2020). Furthermore, the high expectations of parenting and work make balancing work, family, and personal lives harder (Hermann et al., 2014). Mothers can, therefore, struggle more than fathers to achieve a healthy work-life balance, leading to stress and burnout (Asher, 2012; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). Therefore, some mothers continue to choose a more sustainable work-life balance by deciding not to pursue careers that demand 'an extreme work model (Francis-Devine, 2022; Hewlett et al., 2010). Women who are successful at achieving the top jobs are more likely to be divorced than their men counterparts, suggesting that men are not contending with the same challenges as women in the household (Folke & Rickne, 2020).

Labour of Fatherhood. English governments' commitments since 2010 to a neoliberal economic model have entrenched a more traditional gendered division of paid and unpaid care (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). However, policy developments and social change have begun to disrupt traditional gendered roles and challenge essentialist conceptions of women, men, mothers, and fathers by encouraging women to work and fathers to become more involved with childcare. (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). Recent policy developments are underpinned by the language of 'new' and 'involved' fatherhood and the promotion of shared responsibility of care to enhance the father's position as a carer and to promote mothers and fathers as equal co-parents in the family (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Busbly & Weldon-Johns, 2019;

Gov.uk, 2022a). In England, policy support for both parents to take leave to care for their children has meant there has been a move towards dual earner households, and women's employment status, once they have children, is much more stable than in previous generations (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). According to research by the ONS, there has been a shift in traditional earning patterns in men's and women's households; the percentage of households in which women earn more than men has steadily increased since 2004 (O'Connor, 2020). In England, the increased participation of both parents in waged labour confirms that gender neutrality in care provision has been a desirable policy goal and outcome (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). Although traditional socio-cultural roles ascribed to men and women potentially pose barriers to women's advancement, an overreliance on essentialist notions of gender fails to recognise diversity in individual circumstances, practices, and aspirations (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019).

The legitimacy of participative fathering has been growing in England, supported by the introduction of policies facilitating paternal leave and flexible working for parents (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). There are indications that men's contribution to unpaid domestic work and childcare has increased, and men's attitudes are changing; Ellison et al. (2009) found that over two thirds of men rejected the statement that childcare is the primary responsibility of the mother. More recent research confirms that fathers, in general, are keen to be more involved in caring for their children (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019) and that fathers are taking a more involved role in child-rearing than previous generations of fathers (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019; Kelland et al., 2022).

However, shifts in fathers' attitudes have outpaced changes in behaviour (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Fathers access policies that support work-life balance less than mothers (Kelland et al., 2022). Most English fathers continue to perform the traditional role of primary earner, rarely reducing paid work hours for caregiving, with mothers upholding the larger share of caregiving activities, regardless of either parent's working hours or salary (Kelland et al., 2022). Many men continue to fear compromising their careers by working flexibly or the stigma of caring for children (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Birkett & Forbes, 2018; Kelland et al., 2022). Research confirms that men's careers continue to take precedence over women's (Kelland et al., 2022). Furthermore, men's engagement in unpaid domestic work and childcare has been outpaced by women's engagement with paid employment (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). Recent research conducted since the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrates the resilience of the unequal gendered division of unpaid domestic work and childcare and suggests that the Covid-19 pandemic may have further entrenched division (Adams-Prassi et al., 2020; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020).

The alignment of the ideal 'new father' underpinning policy developments to actual enactment remains problematic (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019; Kelland et al., 2022). Academic research highlights the tensions between the ideal 'new father', essentialist gendered views on fatherhood and motherhood, and legislation on parental leave (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019; Kelland et al., 2022). Prevailing cultural adherence to the male breadwinner ideology (Kelland et al., 2022), the tensions between the 'new father' ideal and traditional assumptions of masculinity (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019), and structural challenges associated with access to flexible working and financial penalties (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Birkett & Forbes, 2018; Moss & O'Brien,

2019) explain the adherence to traditional gendered norms. The experience in Nordic countries, which sit at the top of the Gender index (World Economic Forum, 2022), shows that despite improved legal frameworks, rising women's employment and educational levels, and improvement in father's involvement in child-rearing, the gender pay gap remains, reflecting the persistence of social norms and values that position men as the breadwinner (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). In Iceland, for example, in line with the rest of Europe, mothers reduce their working hours following childbirth more often than fathers (Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018). Improved policy frameworks designed to enable fathers to become more participative fathers sit in tension with powerful discourses on intensive mothering and engrained organisational and familial expectations (Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018).

Reflections on Motherhood: Maternal Theory and the Labour of Motherhood

The research on motherhood has foregrounded the oppressive dimensions of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), which emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s (O'Reilly, 2020). Intensive mothering and its embedded discourse of maternal guilt have regulated women's behaviours and inhibited career advancement, with personal cost to women's well-being (Asher, 2012; Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2020). Furthermore, by marginalising fathers, intensive mothering complicates paternal involvement and reinforces essentialist binary constructs (Asher, 2012; Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2020). However, emerging research is beginning to challenge intensive mothering and consider how women resist and achieve an experience of mothering that is more empowered and inclusive of mothering practices, including queer mothering (O'Reilly, 2020). A family policy framework encouraging participative fathering and women's

participation in the waged work market creates opportunities for mothers and fathers to share parenting more equally. Current research suggests that despite a discourse of active fathering and a shift in fathers' attitudes, fathering continues to be performed according to an essentialist model (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Birkett & Forbes, 2018; Kelland et al., 2022). However, redefining motherhood as a site of power affects social change and supports a more equitable society by undermining essentialist binaries (Green, 2020).

The emergence of extreme work model from the 1990s poses challenges to mothers performing intensive mothering (Vernier & Vala, 2018; Williams, 2001). The long hours demanded of work in this model clash with the time demands of intensive mothering, setting mothers up to fulfil an impossible conundrum. Even for women who have resisted intensive mothering, school leadership becomes more complicated if an unequal division of labour in the home persists. The consequence is that mothers often take sideways moves or step down from demanding roles when they become mothers (Ely et al., 2014; Joyce & Norris Keiller, 2018). Child-rearing and domestic duties divided along traditional essentialist binary constructs continue to disadvantage women (Bryan, 2020; Vernier & Vala, 2018). Research on cognitive labour suggests that more research needs to be carried out. Until recently overlooked, studies that ignore it are likely to overestimate the gender gap between men and women (Daminger, 2019).

The extensive use of ICT in the 21st century has the potential to enable a better work-life balance for women professionals, including school leaders, through enabling an anywhere, anytime connectedness (Fenner & Renn, 2004). However, if rules are not

put in place to boundary work, leisure and family, ICT through blurring boundaries is likely to have a detrimental effect on work-life balance (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007).

The statements below reflect the central findings emerging from the review of the literature:

1. The oppressive nature of motherhood
2. The incompatibility of motherhood and work, such as leadership, when there is an unequal division of labour in the home, which conflicts with the long hours demanded in work

The review highlights ways forward by analysing the key areas upon which research on motherhood has been mainly focused. The questions below more precisely align with the research itself and inform the research questions:

1. What factors enable mothers and fathers to resist intensive mothering to enact a nonessentialist performativity of gender and experience a more empowering experience of mothering?
2. How do mothers work an extreme work model and perform the labour of motherhood to establish a work-life balance?

Women: Leadership and Headship

Gender inequality in leadership is generally well recognised, not just in education but other sectors such as business and politics. Research focuses on explaining women's underrepresentation (Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Moorosi, 2019). The influence of essentialist gender constructs on women aspiring to and performance

of leadership is explored (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Johnson & Williams, 2020). Following this, an analytical overview of gender in educational leadership research is presented, with a particular focus on the educational leadership of English secondary schools most aligned with this research (Coleman, 2001; Fuller, 2009; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). The content is organised around the thematic areas which research in the field has mainly focused on: women's incorporation of an essentialist discourse; organisational practices that act as barriers to women's careers; discrimination and stereotyping related to motherhood; strategies to support women's advancement; and the challenges women headteachers experience, intensified by neoliberal policies (Coleman, 2001; Fuller, 2009; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016; Showunmi, 2022). The final part explores the limited literature on women's leadership and mothering; this area has received little focus as women leading English schools whilst mothering dependent-aged children is a relatively new phenomenon.

Essentialist Gender Constructs of Leadership

The historical domination of public leadership by men has meant that the construction of leadership has traditionally been informed by perceptions of stereotypically masculine traits whilst devaluing feminine traits (Johnson & Williams, 2020). Society has long positioned men as agentic and possessing qualities synonymous with a successful leader, such as ambition, dominance, forcefulness, and risk-taking (Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Eagly, 2005; Koenig et al., 2011). Women, in contrast, are associated with being more communal and considerate (Johnson & Williams, 2020), appropriate for a caring role but not to lead an organisation. An overreliance on masculine traits to describe leadership has constrained what a leader should look like

to the disadvantage of women (Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Even though research asserts models of effective leadership that are more relational and consensus-based (Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Book, 2000; Kolpakov & Boyer, 2021) – characteristics that have been interpreted as 'feminine' approaches - Western models of leadership are still often analysed and defined through the lens of masculinity, often white, as a general concept (Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022).

Leadership defined according to stereotyped masculine traits has acted as a barrier to women's advancement as leaders (Blake-Beard et al., 2020). The 'glass ceiling' is a metaphor widely adopted since the 1990s to describe the underrepresentation of women in management positions in the private sector (Hymnowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The 'glass ceiling' refers to a subtle, transparent, but strong barrier that prevents women from moving up the organisational ranks (Hymnowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The 'glass ceiling' metaphor suggests the problem is only at the top, ignoring the barriers women encounter in their careers before applying to top positions (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Moorosi, 2019). Eagly and Carli (2007) dismiss the usefulness of the 'glass ceiling' metaphor because of its inadequacy in accounting for intersecting differences between women and explaining challenges women contend with throughout their careers. Instead, Eagly and Carli (2007) propose women's challenges are better characterised as a labyrinth or maze of many barriers. In educational leadership, the labyrinth is a more useful metaphor for analysing the challenges to women's progression to headship, which are multiple and complex (Moorosi, 2019).

Indeed, women in the private and public sectors achieve top leadership positions. Ryan and Haslam (2005) suggest the term 'glass cliff' to describe the often precarious nature of the promotion of women, especially Black Minority Ethnic (BME) women. The 'glass cliff' denotes women being promoted to organisations in challenging circumstances wherein successful leadership is difficult to achieve and demonstrate. Occupying difficult leadership positions confirms incorporated essentialist beliefs that leadership is not for women, portrays women as incompetent leaders, and deters other women from aspiring for leadership (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). In education, Moorosi et al. (2018) confirm the validity of the 'glass cliff' phenomenon in their study on the experiences of black women school leaders across England, South Africa, and the United States.

In England, despite the advancement of women to high-profile and executive leadership positions in the private and public sectors, the gap between men's and women's advancement to senior positions endures; only one in three leadership roles and around 25% of all executive committee roles in the Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) 350 companies are held by women (Gov.uk, 2022c). Overt and covert sexism continue to affect women's advancement by limiting opportunities for advancement and affecting their perceptions of their role and status in society (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Racial inequalities further create multiple disadvantages for black women and women of colour (Showunmi, 2018).

Globalisation and technological advances have changed ways of working and leadership models (Young, 2016). More and more companies recognise that collaborative rather than autocratic and competitive leadership behaviours garner

more success in managing change and growing an organisation (Young, 2016). Even if progress has been slow in closing the gap between men's and women's career advancement to leadership, a reconstruction of leadership models to emphasise collaborative models could open opportunities for women leaders.

Furthermore, structural changes introduced by English policy reform to promote equality has begun to encourage woman's leadership careers. For example, government action, enforcing all employers of at least 250 employees to report the pay of their employees, has raised awareness of the gender pay gap and focused attention on the reasons why more men than women occupy senior roles (Gov.uk, 2020). Furthermore, though there remains a gap between men and women in FTSE 350 leadership roles, the government, by setting targets for UK business, has achieved greater representation of women on the boards of the FTSE 100 companies (Gov.uk, 2022c).

Women's Underrepresentation in Headship

The gender in educational leadership literature examines the barriers women face aspiring to headship and how women can overcome these barriers (Coleman, 2001; 2022; Fuller, 2009; 2017; Moorosi, 2019; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022; Smith, 2016; Torrence et al., 2017). The content is organised by two thematic areas that capture the key areas in the research and those most pertinent to this study: i) the influence of masculine constructs of leadership that deter women from applying for senior leadership by influencing their confidence and informing the discrimination women face on applying for headship (Blackmore, 2022; Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2014;

Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022; Showunmi, 2022; Smith, 2016; Torrence et al., 2017); ii) the issues of balancing home and work, which act as a barrier to women's careers (Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2013; Muller et al., 2021; Smith, 2016).

Masculine Constructs of School Leadership

Masculine constructs of leadership deter women from applying and inform the discrimination women may face on applying for headship (Blackmore, 2022; Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2014; Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022; Showunmi, 2022; Smith, 2011b). In the 1980s, Blackmore (1989) highlighted that the masculine construction of leadership in schools was possibly the reason that women were consistently excluded from school leadership. Theories of educational leadership emerged from business and developed from studies of those who held formal leadership positions and were predominantly men (Blackmore, 1989). These studies often projected men role models and articulations of men leadership behaviours. Women were often alienated by the masculine portrayal of leadership and organisational life, emphasising control, individualism, and hierarchy (Blackmore, 1989). Although educational leadership theories have developed since then to assert the efficacy of more relational leadership models (Day et al., 2009; Earley, 2022), an authoritarian leadership style framed by neoliberalist discourse remains in many English schools (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022).

Neoliberal education policies based on the principles of NPM developed by successive English governments since 1997 have had implications for the social interpretation of who occupies leadership positions and what the enactment of leadership looks like (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Leadership has been characterised as rational,

competitive, hierarchical, and outcome-orientated (Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022), qualities attributed to the traditional masculine practice. When the dominant leadership discourse is defined in such a way, women are disadvantaged (Blackmore, 2022) because they are labelled weak and ineffective (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022). Therefore, women are discriminated against in the application process.

Managerialist cultures and associated hostile work environments also discourage women from leadership (Coleman, 2007; Smith, 2011b). In schools adopting a managerialist culture, women report disinterest in applying for headship (Coleman, 2011). Smith's (2011b) life history study exploring the factors affecting 40 English secondary school teachers' career decisions shows that managerialist cultures in schools actively discourage women from applying for senior leadership and headship.

Lack of Confidence. Women working within schools where a hegemonic model shapes the leadership discourse can internalise feelings that leadership is inappropriate for them and may lose faith in their power (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022). Research pointing to internal factors that stop women from applying for headship identifies women as less confident than their men colleagues in applying for promotion (Coleman, 2007; Kaparou & Bush, 2007). The importance encouragement plays in the development of many women teachers' careers also suggests that women are not as self-confident as men (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). Encouragement and support from colleagues and headteachers are crucial to women's careers - rather than planning for headship, women leaders appear to be encouraged to go for headship (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017).

A lack of confidence can manifest in women's self-perception that they need more education and classroom experience before seeking headship (Fuller, 2009; Smith, 2011b). Fuller (2009) highlights a difference between the career paths of men and women to headship: many more women than men hold senior positions before deputy headship. Smith (2011b) concurs that women teachers are more cautious and acquire more experience than men leaders. Furthermore, the literature foregrounds how women, unlike men teachers, have limited aspirations in their early career phase (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a; Torrence et al., 2017). Smith (2011b) reports: "Women were more likely than men to aspire to the post of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, and men were more likely than women to aspire to the most senior posts, especially headship" (p. 861). The result of limited aspirations as teachers and gaining more experience than their men counterparts can translate for women into slower career progression and reduce the opportunities to apply for headship (Torrence et al., 2017)

The research suggests that men and women approach their leadership careers differently, describing women attaining leadership positions more by chance, taking opportunities as they arise rather than by intention (Coleman, 2002; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a). Women taking opportunities as they occur rather than actively seeking promotion is associated with a lack of confidence (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017) and the incorporation of a sense that leadership is not for them as women (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022). Having no clear, structured plan seems more common to women than men (Coleman, 2002). A lack of career planning is highlighted as a barrier to women's leadership career advancement because actively seeking out

developmental opportunities enables earlier applications for headship, increasing the likelihood of success (Coleman, 2002; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a).

However, women's career approach may also be explained by other factors. Firstly, familial factors influence women's careers more (Coleman, 2002; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017), making career planning harder as women contend with the demands of family. McKillop and Moorosi (2017) concur with Coleman (2002), suggesting little change over time that women's careers are more likely to be slowed down and interrupted by aspects of family, such as considerations about the timing of children and specific personal circumstances. Research on women's careers in the public sector suggests that because women's promotion causes more stress on the household and increases the likelihood of divorce, women make conscious decisions to hold back their careers to remain less successful than their husbands (Folke & Rickne, 2020). Also, recent research suggests women are reframing ambition in terms of happiness, well-being, and work-life balance (Harman & Sealy, 2017; Hartman & Barber, 2020) rather than in terms of power, performance and end goals, which influences their career trajectories.

Discrimination Applying for Headship. A body of English-based research evidences that women experience indirect and direct discrimination during the processes of selection and recruitment for headship (Coleman, 2007; Fuller, 2009; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010). Coleman (2007) reports that half of the women secondary headteachers experience discrimination when applying for or seeking promotion. Similarly, Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010) find the same barriers facing women in the selection process for headship, noting insignificant change since

2007. In addition, Fuller's (2009) qualitative study of women and men headteachers in Birmingham also concurs that discrimination stalls women's careers at the acquisition phase of their career: 64.7% of women were aware of 'sexist attitudes' within job applications or promotion processes.

The vision of leadership associated with men shapes the discrimination women experience. Women leaders articulate that discrimination often takes the form of governor's preference for men leaders and prejudices that women headteachers are unsuitable to lead a school (Coleman, 2007). Teachers in Coleman's study (2007) report examples of direct discrimination, "LA advice: Don't bother applying, the governors will not appoint a woman." (p. 387). Similarly, Coleman and Campbell-Steven (2010) reported biases continued to influence the idea that white men are suitable to lead a school in a way that women are not: "Discrimination and ethnic (and gender) prejudice continue to affect the processes of selection and recruitment of headteachers." (p. 47). Coleman (2011) describes the tendency of governing bodies to be made up predominantly of white men as an issue because of unconscious bias to appoint a headteacher who looks like themselves. Finally, governing body discrimination and its influence on the diversity of school leaders has been more recently cited in the media (O'Conor, 2015; Hill, 2022). Although Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010) emphasise the need to re-evaluate governor training, little research since 2011 exploring governing bodies' attitudes, practices, and how they affect school leadership appointments has been done to inform the reconfiguration of governor training.

Finally, traditional expectations of women as caregivers also influence the discrimination women encounter. Coleman (2002) and Fuller (2009) report that women experiencing direct discrimination are more likely to have experienced negative comments regarding their domestic and family responsibilities. At the interview stage, discrimination often emerges in the form of questions about managing childcare and explicit concerns that domestic responsibilities may affect their ability to do their job (Coleman, 2007; Fuller, 2009). This study intends to contribute more current evidence on the extent of discrimination women experience in their leadership careers. In English law, maternity is a legally protected characteristic (Equality Act 2010a, s18)

Motherhood and Career Aspirations

Motherhood continues to be acknowledged in the research as a major factor influencing women leaders' career patterns (Coleman, 2002; Edge et al., 2022; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011b). In contrast, discussions of parenthood and educational leadership rarely centre on men (Edge et al., 2022). However, focusing on women's experiences to the exclusion of men makes gender synonymous with women, making the gender research literature in educational leadership predominantly about women (Moorosi, 2019).

Powerful social discourses of motherhood continue to restrict women with children and those who plan to have children in their leadership career decisions (Smith, 2011b). Incorporated expectations of intensive mothering, which direct women to primarily focus on their children, exist in tension with the expectations of the role of headteacher in England currently, which demands high levels of accountability and long working

hours (Smith, 2011b). Smith's (2011b) life history study exploring the factors women teachers perceive to have affected their career decisions notes motherhood as particularly influential. The women teachers report modifying their aspirations and relinquishing professional responsibilities, including pay and status (Smith, 2011b), to meet the needs of their families. Limitations on their career advancement include accommodating their partner's careers, prioritising child-rearing over career advancement, and restricting their careers to a geographical area for reasons relating to home, family, and relationships (Smith, 2011b).

Women are often choosing not to apply for headship because of the detrimental effect the demands of headship are perceived to have on family life (Coleman, 2007; Smith, 2011b). Headship is seen as incompatible with family life: "Headship, in particular, was seen as highly likely to be detrimental, leaving less time for family and home life. Taking on posts of increased responsibility was seen to involve extra work, and thus incompatible with family life." (Smith, 2016, p. 97)**.** Fuller (2013; 2014) concurs that motherhood is a major factor influencing women's decisions to apply for headship. Fuller (2013) reports that women facing the challenges of balancing the dual roles of leadership and motherhood either choose not to have children or give up work when they have children. Fuller (2014) suggests women's reluctance to perform multiple roles, mother, leader, and homemaker, in the way demanded in the current educational context deters teachers from applying for headship. More recent research (Muller et al., 2021) on mid-career teachers confirms that women, distinct from men, perceive the workload associated with leadership roles as incompatible with family commitments. In gender and educational leadership literature overwhelmingly, the focus is on how motherhood acts as a barrier to women's career advancement

(Moorosi, 2019; Torrence et al., 2017), and little if any research exists on the positive influences mothering can have on women's careers.

The research suggests that school leaders' partners do not play a significant role in childcare, increasing pressure on women leaders to manage dual roles (Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011a; Smith, 2011b). In Smith's (2011b) study, despite the frequent discussions with participants about children and home, there are few references to partners or husbands in the narratives; no one participating mentions the possibility of a husband or partner being responsible for childcare. Smith (2011b) concludes that there has been little change in the expectations of women school leaders as the main carer since Colemans' (2002) study on women headteachers.

Maternity Leave / Career Breaks. Women's careers in education also continue to suffer from taking career breaks for maternity leave or longer childcare (Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2009). Despite the introduction of shared parental leave (Gov.uk, 2022a), many women continue to take the full statutory entitlement (Banister & Kerrane, 2022). Career breaks taken to raise children have an enduring detrimental effect on women's career progression because they often return to a job with less responsibility, either whole school or departmental and less pay, reflecting the change in role from the one they previously held (Coleman, 2011; Smith, 2016). Smith's (2016) findings agreed with Colman's (2011) that "the timing of childbearing also impacted on the participants' potential for career progression, and those taking career breaks were likely to find that they experienced a reduction in status that may never be fully repaired" (2016, p. 103). Women teachers returning from maternity leave are more likely to return to part-time hours, which, as previously mentioned, may reinforce

others' perceptions that they are less committed to their roles. Working part-time has a knock-on influence and may hinder career aspirations.

Focused qualitative research exploring the reality of taking maternity leave while serving as a headteacher is essential due to demographic changes of women achieving headship younger and having children later is a phenomenon now more likely to exist (Edge, 2014; Fuller, 2017; ONS, 2020b).

Organised Childcare. There is a clear link between access to childcare and women's careers (Hochlaf & Cohen, 2021). Whilst women are expected to provide most of the childcare or are time-restricted by nursery scheduled hours, developing professional careers, especially those that demand inflexible and long hours, remains challenging. In the gendered educational leadership research, the ad hoc nature of organised childcare at institutional, local, or national levels is identified as a factor in explaining the underrepresentation of women in headship (Fuller, 2009; Smith, 2016). Fuller (2009) suggests that providing quality childcare may contribute to regional differences in the proportion of women secondary headteachers. The higher proportion of women secondary headteachers in Birmingham can be partly explained by their contentment with their childcare arrangements and the fact that fewer men rely on their partners for childcare (Fuller, 2009). London is another area with a high proportion of women secondary headteachers and the largest number of childcare providers, nearly eight times more than the entire Northeast of England (Clark, 2021). Although the availability of high-quality childcare is not the only factor in improving women's representation in secondary school headship, if women are not expected to provide most of the childcare, they are more able to develop their careers.

Factors Advancing Women's Educational Leadership Careers

Research suggests a relational nature to women's careers (Bimrose et al., 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017), meaning that women's careers are understood and influenced by relationships that exist across multiple domains of life, including home and work, shaped by an array of social interactions and interdependencies rather than constructed in an uncontextualised, independent manner (Afiouni et al., 2020). The labyrinth metaphor has enabled an analysis of the challenges and opportunities through which frame, mentoring, coaching, and support have been identified as enablers of women's career development (Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2009; Fuller, 2016; Smith, 2011b).

Headteacher mentoring. One of aspiring leaders' most important professional working relationships is working alongside other headteachers (Colman, 2011; Fuller, 2009; 2014; Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2013). Johnson and Campbell-Stephens (2013), exploring the views of black BME school leaders in London, note that the most important professional development is direct support from another headteacher: "Aspiring leaders often point to experiences working alongside other headteachers as the single most powerful learning experience in their development." (p. 33) Similarly, Coleman (2011) concurs the value of headteacher mentoring in enabling women to step up to headship. Furthermore, Fuller (2009; 2014) identifies women headteachers acting as mentors in London and Birmingham as an important factor for the advancement of women in those regions. McKillop & Moorosi (2017) highlight the

crucial role the encouragement of the headteacher plays in prompting women to apply for headship.

Mentoring. Mentoring is important in encouraging women's career advancement (Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2009; Fuller, 2016; Smith, 2011b). Mentoring has been shown to build women's confidence to apply for leadership roles (Smith, 2011b). Research into women school leaders (Coleman, 2011; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Fuller, 2009; 2014; 2016) and BME leaders (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010) note how the value of learning from a senior leader is more powerful if that leader is like them: "A key point was that seeing black role models and recognising the qualities that they themselves could bring enabled them to aspire to headship." (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010, p. 47). Women leaders as mentors and role models are an inspiration to aspiring women leaders (Coleman, 2011; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Fuller, 2009; Fuller, 2014; Fuller, 2016) and provide women with career role models and advice on balancing work and family, career development and strategies for overcoming gendered career barriers (Coleman, 2011; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Fuller, 2009; Fuller, 2014; Fuller, 2016). Equally, all women networks contribute to women gaining greater equity in management by helping them forge links that can help their careers and provide mutual support, as well as formal and informal mentoring (Coleman, 2022).

Challenges of the Neoliberal Presentation of School Leadership

A neoliberal presentation of leadership not only deters women from leading but also presents challenges for women headteachers (Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022). The

review of the content is organised around the key areas upon which research in the field of gender in educational leadership has mainly focused: i) constraints imposed on women's leadership by a neoliberal construct of school leadership, ii) the impact of complex and demanding workload, ii) issues of balancing home and work responsibilities.

Neoliberal Framing of School Leadership. Managerialism's emphasis on efficiency and skill and preeminent discourse of control over others establishes leadership models aligned with masculine leadership models. Consequently, the traditional notion of a headteacher is a "trope in which the masculine white male continues to prosper" (Lee, 2021, p. 2). The essentialist construct of leadership posits challenges for women in school leadership to lead confidently and according to their own values (Coleman, 2007; Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022; Smith, 2016). Oppenhaim-Schachar (2022) argues women headteachers are likely to feel frustrated and a failure in schools where they are exposed to a hegemonic Western model of leadership. Consequently, women may lose faith in their power and ability, affecting their decision-making (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022).

In a context where leadership is aligned with masculine models, women leaders can be seen stepping outside socially constructed, acceptable protocols for women and drawing disapproval for transgressing the boundaries of being a woman and a mother (Krefting, 2003). Women leaders can, therefore, feel or be made to feel like 'outsiders', as leadership is unconsciously identified with men. This is problematic because 'outsider status' leaves women leaders highly visible and exposed (Coleman, 2007; Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022). Coleman (2007) compares men's and women's

secondary headteachers' experiences, arguing because women are a numerical minority, their performance is more likely to be harshly judged than their men counterparts. Women report their job is vulnerable because risk has been taken in employing them, as the governors do not follow the norm and appoint a man (Coleman, 2007). To avoid disapproval, women may conform to the traditional masculine characteristics, hiding traits such as humility and sensitivity, considered traditionally feminine to fulfil these expectations and end up reinforcing a model of leadership conceptualised in masculine terms (Kolpakov & Boyer, 2021; Kruse & Prettyman, 2008; Showunmi, 2018). Even when women are highly qualified, they may be burdened to overcome follower preconceptions that they cannot lead effectively (Oplatka, 2016).

Recently, in gender and educational leadership research, there has been a reluctance to analyse constructs of leadership through the lens of male and female traits and characteristics because such analysis reinforces essentialism (Moorosi, 2019). As more women enter educational leadership roles, expectations have been challenged. A relational style of leadership, which measures the importance of the headteacher through their influence on the motivation and development of staff, is currently advocated in the educational leadership literature as the most effective approach (Day et al., 2009; Earley, 2022). Effective leadership in school links leadership to a strong sense of moral purpose and the professional and personal values of the leader (Earley, 2022). While some earlier research suggests women often adopt a male style of leadership defined by traits and competencies to be more accepted (Showunmi, 2018) – the shift in emphasis on what successful school leadership looks like offers opportunities for women (and men) to lead according to priorities that challenge a

neoliberal, masculine concept of leadership based upon essentialist gender stereotypes.

Headteacher Workload and Work-life Balance. Due to the pressure of globalisation (Greany & Earley, 2022) and the influence of neoliberalism (Ball, 1994; Starr, 2021), the transformation of English schools, their organisation, and governance have had significant implications for headteacher workload. Furthermore, while remaining committed to school autonomy, centralised accountability, and quasi-markets, policymakers have begun to recognise the unintended consequences, meaning successive governments continually seek to adjust policy (Greany & Earley, 2022). Over the last decade, this plethora of policies, policy changes, and initiatives have negatively affected headteachers' work-life balance and well-being (Dunning & Elliot, 2019; Greany & Earley, 2022). Furthermore, policymakers put pressure on leaders to resolve the tension in leading autonomous and accountable systems themselves (Greany & Earley, 2022). Leaders are expected to utilise their autonomy to meet parental and student needs and meet centrally prescribed targets, such as closing the gap and maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum. The implications for school leaders are that their role has become more complicated, navigating new policies and working out which to implement and to ignore. How leaders navigate and mitigate the tensions between these two positions is fundamental to their own and their staff's well-being (Craig, 2022; Greany & Earley, 2022).

The heavy workload of school leadership is affirmed by personal testimonies, newspaper headlines, and literature as a 'multi-faceted juggling Act' (Dunning & Elliot, 2019). Workload has become one of the most pressing public tensions in England

(DfE, 2018; Dunning & Elliot, 2019). Despite policy initiatives to address the issues of workload and well-being, including the National Agreement (DfES, 2003) and Reducing School Workload (DfE, 2018), the hours that English senior school leaders work on average remain above 55 hours/week (Walker et al., 2019). Workload continues to be perceived as a serious problem, with 20% of senior leaders in the DfE 2019 survey reporting that workload is a very serious problem (Walker et al., 2019). Demanding workloads have been linked to a downward movement of morale and are a serious challenge in retaining staff (NEU, 2018; Zuccollo, 2019; Bingham, 2022). According to the NAHT (2021), working hours are one of two reasons for headteachers to consider leaving their position; the other is a lack of autonomy.

Work-Life Balance. Leadership practice, widely believed to be complicated, demanding, and time-consuming, has significant implications for leaders' personal lives (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). The perception of English school headship emerging from the research in the last decade is that headship comes at great personal cost and is the root of domestic conflict and, on occasion, marriage break-up (MacBeath, 2011; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Gender research in education leadership highlights work-life balance as one of the most important concerns of serving women headteachers (Coleman, 2002; Torrence et al., 2017; Smith, 2011b). Torrence et al. (2017) and Smith (2011b) confirm Coleman's findings from 20 years ago (2002) that the heavy workload of headship remains the most pressing challenge of headship. Coleman (2002) concludes that entrenched essentialist gender roles, especially in terms of home and family, mean that the time-consuming nature of headship influences women's work–life balance more strongly, which feeds into their

perceptions of self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and well-being. Coleman (2002) concludes:

> The natural expectation that it will be the woman who takes the lead role in family and childcare imposes a burden on the women heads with children. It was clear that many of the women headteachers were preoccupied with the guilt engendered by their role conflict as mothers and career women. (p. 56)

Similarly, Torrence et al. (2017) report headteachers struggle with personal challenges linked to balancing the demands of headship with mothering and how the spillover of work into the evenings prevents them from spending quality time with their families. One of the headteachers articulates: "Being able to spend quality time with my family in the evenings and the weekends. Now that's not physically possible." (Torrence et al., 2017, p. 23).

The gender in educational leadership research suggests that even women who are headteachers are the primary carers and responsible for the domestic arrangements, increasing the pressure on their work-life balance (Coleman 2002; Smith, 2011b; Smith, 2016). These findings concur with recent ONS (2021) data, which identifies women as the main carers and responsible for domestic labour. Only rarely, if at all, are fathers mentioned in providing support (Coleman, 2022; Bradbury & Gunter, 2006; Smith, 2016).

Smith (2016) reports little change over time, with women headteachers assuming the primary responsibility for child-rearing. In studies comparing men and women

headteachers' parenting responsibilities, there is a discrepancy in favour of the men headteachers. Coleman's survey found that two-thirds of the men headteachers have wives who take responsibility for the children and home. In contrast, only a third of the women headteachers have a husband who takes responsibility for the children and home (Coleman, 2005). Fuller (2009) concurs that more women than men headteachers take more responsibility than their partners for domestic arrangements such as cooking, shopping, and cleaning. Working long hours, a significant proportion of which are outside normal working hours, is a pattern of working that advantages men and women with no family commitments (Coleman, 2002).

Support with childcare is essential to enable mothers to establish a work-life balance. The limited body of research in the educational leadership literature highlights the importance of family support and organised childcare. The ERSC Young Global Leaders study (Edge, 2014) highlights the importance of grandparents in helping school leaders manage their childcare. Some women leaders' experiences in Coleman's (2011) study concur with these findings. However, support from extended family is unusual in younger mothers in Smith's study, perhaps suggesting that extended family structures are less prevalent in the twenty-first century (Smith, 2011b). However, these women came from white British families, and a more ethnically diverse sample is likely to have produced different findings. The importance of families in supporting women headteachers is under-researched (Edge, 2014).

The Opportunities of Motherhood for Headship

There is only a small body of educational leadership research that explores how mothers lead schools and the opportunities mothering presents (Fuller, 2013; Lumby & Azaola, 2011; Smith, 2011b, 2016), and none focuses entirely on this cohort of women in English secondary schools. This body of educational leadership research identifies how parenthood can serve to empower both men and women leaders by adding an additional pupil perspective (Edge et al., 2022; Lumby and Azaola, 2011). A family acts as a benchmark for school standards, engendering empathy with parents and engaging leaders with a broader discussion about education (Edge et al., 2022; Lumby & Azaola, 2011). Motherhood can empower women leaders through enabling personal growth (Edge et al., 2022; Fuller, 2013; 2014; Lumby & Azaola, 2011). Lumby & Azaola (2011) suggest motherhood enables skill development and increases women's sense of agency by enhancing their self-awareness. Fuller (2013) explores how headteachers' social identities of gender, class, and ethnicity influence leadership practices and also demonstrates how being a parent can increase a woman's sense of agency by developing her sense of self.

Furthermore, the position of headteacher can enable a healthy work-life balance by offering more control over workload (Smith, 2011b). Smith (2011b) discusses how the narratives of the headteachers, who are mothers, are characterised by more self-determination than the teachers, who are mothers; the headteachers centre less on the guilt engendered by the time their work takes them away from their children. The women headteachers describe having a clear sense of engaging reflectively with social influences and taking positive actions to shape their own lives and careers (Smith, 2011b). One of the factors explaining the difference women perceive in their experiences of leading and teaching, whilst mothers, is a sense of control they feel

they can exert over their workload. Headteachers, who are mothers, perceive greater control over their lives afforded by the headship position. In contrast, teachers appear to struggle more to balance the responsibilities of family and work:

> There were indications that the headteachers perceived their position afforded them greater control over their lives. This contrasts with the experiences of the teacher mothers in the study, for whom struggling to balance responsibilities and emotional conflicts emerged as a much greater preoccupation and who tended to view headship as a role that would control and restrict them. (Smith, 2016, p. 102)

Although a small cohort, Smith's (2016) research suggests the compatibility of motherhood and school leadership and how motherhood and leadership can potentially enrich each other.

Reflections on Women, Leadership, and Headship

This section aims to present an analytical overview of the research on gender in educational leadership, the field this study is situated within, to pull together the key issues, thereby informing the final articulation of research questions addressed in Chapter Seven. Gender in educational leadership has emerged due to a growing focus on gender inequality in the top leadership positions within educational organisations and predominantly seeks to explain women's underrepresentation. Leadership has been essentially binary in its construction, and an overreliance on masculine traits to construct models of effective leadership has constrained what a leader should look like to the disadvantage of women (Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Despite an English policy reform agenda

that has attempted to encourage more women into top leadership positions, there has been only limited progress in the private sector of women achieving the highest leadership positions (Gov.uk, 2022c) and even less for black women whose careers continue to be limited by an intersectional experience, which is greater than the sum of racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1991; Showunmi, 2018). Although women are better represented in headship in English secondary schools, there has been little improvement in the last ten years, and there remain few headteachers from BME groups (Fuller, 2017; Moorosi, 2019). Only a few women reach the top leadership positions of executive principal or chief executive officer (Belger, 2022; Fuller, 2017)

The underrepresentation of women in school leadership positions is the central question that has driven research (Coleman, 2001; 2022; Fuller, 2009; 2017; Moorosi, 2019; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022; Smith, 2016; Torrence et al., 2017). The main themes explaining the barriers women face suggest the resilience of binary essentialism: women continue to face discrimination on applying for headship and stereotyping linked to motherhood (Coleman, 2001; 2022; Fuller, 2009; 2017; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016; Torrence et al., 2017); women are deterred by managerialist cultures and embedded masculine constructs of leadership (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022); and women's incorporation of essentialism diminishes their confidence (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022). The role of mentoring to empower women and for skill development is foregrounded as an important strategy to enable women's careers (Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2009; Fuller, 2016; Smith, 2011b). Mentoring by their current headteacher is highlighted as especially valuable in building the expertise and confidence of women and even more powerful if that leader looks like them (Coleman, 2011; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Fuller, 2009; Fuller, 2014; Fuller, 2016).

The literature also highlights how binary essentialism poses challenges for women headteachers' leadership (Coleman, 2007; Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022; Smith, 2016) and work-life balance, especially if women are mothering (Coleman 2002; Moorosi, 2019; Torrence et al., 2017; Smith 2011b). The long hours demanded by headship and the unequal division of domestic labour pose particular challenges to women leaders who are mothers (Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011b; Smith, 2016). There is only limited evidence in the literature of the opportunities mothering presents for leadership, which suggests that mothering can empower women and provide additional insights to strengthen their leadership. Much research suggests that mothering and leadership are incompatible due to the time demands both require (Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011b; Smith, 2016). However, much of the research on gender in educational leadership was conducted between 1999 – 2014. Since then, the discourse on participative fathering has become more embedded in policy, possibly translating into a more equal division of child-rearing and domestic responsibilities at home. Also, school leadership models have relied less on essentialist constructs and moved to more relational models, better suited to leaders who reject neoliberal priorities (Earley, 2022).

The statements below reflect the central findings emerging from the review of the literature:

1. Women's incorporation of an essentialist discourse, which positions men as agentic and leaders, diminishes their confidence, impeding their career advancement;

2. Women continue to experience discrimination when applying for senior leadership;

3. Managerialist cultures deter women from applying for school leadership and present challenges for their leadership;

4. Women headteachers contend with an unequal division of labour in the home, negatively impacting their work-life balance and well-being.

The review highlights ways forward by analysing the key areas upon which the field has been mainly focused. The questions below more precisely align with the research itself and inform the research questions:

1. How can mothering influence women's leadership in schools?

2. What are the opportunities for leadership in mothering?

3. How does equality legislation and discourse on participative fathering affect women headteachers' leadership experiences and career advancement?

Chapter 3: Methodology

The study develops a multiple case study examining how women secondary school leaders negotiate the challenges and opportunities of headship whilst parenting dependant-aged children in the context of current English education. A constructivist paradigm informs the research approach and explores women's personal experiences and perceptions of leadership and mothering.

In this chapter, the process of the research is outlined. As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that my ontological, epistemological, and methodological positioning and my experiences as a senior leader in a secondary school and mother influence the research. Outlining my position as a researcher and how that informs the overall design of the research and data analysis is the starting point of this chapter. The rationale for the research and the questions which guide and frame the data collection are explained. Finally, the data collection strategy, process of data analysis, and ethical considerations are detailed.

Ontological, Epistemological, and Methodological Positioning

Drawing largely from Foucault and Butler, this study's theoretical perspective adopts a broadly poststructural and feminist stance (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). Poststructuralism and feminism work similarly to critique and interrupt hegemonic and exclusionary ideologies and practices (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). Poststructuralism attempts "to dismantle binary structure of language and the binary linguistic codes and meanings which embed all knowledge." (Dillon, 2010, p. 434). A poststructuralist approach has enabled me to look beyond binary concepts of gender, leadership, and

motherhood and enable my understanding of 'reality' to be continually reconfigured to question what I know, observe, and think. Drawing upon Foucault, I recognise truth as linguistic, and that language produces the real world rather than mirroring it (Foucault, 1991). By organising and regulating our language, we create something more than meaning; language produces real-world effects (Foucault, 1991).

Butler (1990) follows poststructuralist practice and questions the extent that our acts are determined for us by our place within language and convention. Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Butler, 1999) enables a broader understanding of gender and suggests that gender is socially constructed rather than hard-wired by biological sex. By separating biological sex from gender, gender itself, she argues, becomes a free-floating artifice allowing gender to be less of a structuring device limiting the lives of women, men, and non-binary people, but operating as a site of agency in which individuals can work to reshape gendered practices (Butler, 1990; 1999). Butler argues that the very act of performing gender constitutes who we are, that gender does not exist as an objective natural thing: "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent it is performed" (Butler, 1990, p.278). Gender is a performative act in the sense that "the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated" (Butler, 1990, p.140). Butler suggests that gender is something we do through discourse and that the subject is constructed through repetitive forms of enactment, which reconstructs the socially established binary norm. To bring about change, people need to engage in repeated actions that subvert the normative binary configurations to displace the gendered norm. Butler's (1990) concepts of gender 'performance' and 'performativity' are applied in this research. The lexical distinction between 'performance' and 'performativity' in

educational leadership research is important where 'performance' is managed and 'performativity' is a technology that regulates and employs judgements (Ball, 2003).

The research is underpinned by the understanding that gender shapes the material conditions of our lives, and the binary concept of gender according to sex remains resilient (Mavin & Grandy, 2012). However, the research attempts to avoid universal claims about women, gender, and patriarchy, rejecting essentialist categories of gender, 'man' and 'women'. Ringrose (2007) has demonstrated the conceptual problems caused by gender analysis organised as a binary between men/women and fails to consider how gender is differentiated by other intersecting axes of experiences resulting from social class, race, and ethnic-based inequalities. Ringrose (2007) criticises liberal feminist discourses, which present gender as a stand-alone measure or variable, for embedding knowledge into a "binary, oppositional framing that actually incites reversal, with very difficult effects for a feminist politic or movement by impeding a more complex politics of difference" (p. 480). Liberal feminists, by decontextualising gender from all class, cultural, and racial dimensions, have created an abstract and simplified equity schematic that sets the terms for a reactionary debate (Ringrose, 2007). Simply categorising an individual by a single identity category, such as gender, limits our understanding of the complexity of an individual's experiences (Coleman, 2022). By acknowledging differing identities and structural ways 'the system' normalises marginalisation, this research aims to produce evidence that adopts a range of perspectives to view power dynamics and challenges universalist, gender-neutral assumptions of leadership (Showunmi, 2022).

The development of Intersectional feminism has influenced poststructural feminism and acknowledges women's different identities and how they intersect. The concept of intersectionality, originally a relatively obscure legal concept, emerged from the debates about Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism and is often attributed to Crenshaw (1991). Intersectionality was used to broaden the lens of first and second-wave feminism, which largely focused on white middle-class women to include black women, immigrant women and working-class women. This research does not explicitly draw upon intersectional theory on race and ethnicity to inform the analysis of data because the participants are all white. There is a very small number of BME women headteachers in English secondary schools; recent census data reports 129 BME headteachers in English schools (DfE, 2021a; DfE, 2022d). Such a small number explains the difficulties of recruiting BME women headteachers, who are also mothers and is a recognised limitation of the research. However, recognising the social structures and policies that produce and entrench power and marginalisation is important to avoid perpetuating discrimination. Currently, in the UK, BME women at headship level are significantly underrepresented (DfE, 2021a; DfE, 2022d), and is an injustice resulting from the lack of recognition of their capacity for leadership and resources from which to achieve it (Showunmi, 2018). Butler's and Foucault's work raises questions for this research on how to examine leaders' enactment of leadership in schools under a neoliberal educational agenda. This research focuses on the leaders' perceptions of their actions as leadership acts and analyses how leaders' actions influence the conditions in schools for staff, pupils, and parents and how actions of leadership encourage or set up barriers to their career trajectories.

The research draws upon Oppenhaim's (2022) work, which argues for a reconfiguration of how we evaluate leadership, characterising the action rather than the performer. Oppenhaim-Shachar (2022) suggests focusing on leadership actions lowers the power of gender stereotypes and breaks away from the current hegemonic definitions of leadership, which continue to restrict women's school leadership careers. As Foucault asserts, "Power produces. It produces reality" (Foucault, 1991, p. 194). Foucault's concept of power as a regime of truth that pervades society provides a more subtle and nuanced analytical lens to examine actions of leadership (Gaventa, 2003). Foucault challenges the concept of power as something that is wielded by people as sovereign acts of coercion, which places more emphasis on the performer (Gaventa, 2003).

In England, where leaders are confronted by governance structures that are heavily based upon the principles of high stakes accountability, competition, and neoliberalism, a focus on school leadership as the driver for change has been influenced by highly gendered normative assumption of the 'hero' paradigm (Niesche, 2011). This Western definition of leadership framed and analysed through the lens of masculinity, usually white, motivates a whole set of gendered roles and practices that can restrict women's aspirations and self-belief (Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022). This research focusing on a group of women who have been and are successful within a hegemonic Western model of leadership draws on feminist theory (Griffiths, 2006; Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022), which suggests women leaders' enactment of leadership can produce cultural shits by challenging neoliberal claims and perceptions of power to recognise and open up different approaches of power.

In line with current societal linguistic norms and English policy context, I use the terms 'mother' and 'motherhood' in the research to describe the women's parental status and the state of being a parent. Furthermore, the evidence base I draw upon is essentially binary in its conception of parenting. I recognise both terms when positioned within discourse in their difference from 'father' and fatherhood, create binaries and hierarchies, and represent gender-essentialist beliefs about mothering and care norms (O'Reilly, 2020). However, an emphasis on poststructuralism facilitates the disruption of these beliefs. In accord with feminist and poststructuralist insight, I interpret motherhood as a cultural construction and building upon this insight that normative motherhood discourses are rewritten in response to, and as a result of, cultural and economic change (O'Reilly, 2020). The cultural construction of motherhood influences how women perform parenting and their identity and can limit women's career advancement (O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020). I also employ an interdisciplinary perspective recognising how differences from the hegemonic mothering norm are challenged and expanded by different family formations and practices, most pertinent to this study by queer mothers (O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020).

I also draw upon Rich's (2021) distinction made in her feminist work 'Of Women Born' between motherhood as an institution and mothering as a practice, which continues to have relevance (O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020). Rich argues that the realities of motherhood must be differentiated between the experiences that regulate and control women and those that empower them (Rich, 2021). Rich uses the term motherhood to refer to the patriarchal institution of motherhood, defined by men as oppressive to women, and the term mothering refers to women's experiences of mothering, defined as a site of potential empowerment (Rich, 2021). Since Rich's distinction, motherhood

research has focused on the oppressive and empowering dimensions of mothering and the relationship between the two. This study employs Rich's distinction and is positioned within the interconnected categories of inquiry: institution of motherhood (laws, policies of motherhood), motherhood as experience (work women do as mothers), maternal identity (how women's sense of self is shaped by motherhood) and maternal agency/activism (the potentiality of mothering as a site of agency and political activism) (O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020).

Increasingly in England, gender essentialist notions of father and mother are being challenged (Doblhammer & Gumà, 2018). A poststructuralist lens allows me to look for dissonance in normative social practices rather than accept and reinforce gender binaries. In the personal space of relationships and family, the transformation of gender roles offers possibilities for both men and women as parents (Doblhammer & Gumà, 2018). Drawing upon Foucault and Butler, I examine how headship and motherhood are lived and disciplined to explore how women headteachers may be able to act within a variety of disciplinary regimes to influence their daily work practices to influence the culture of their schools and students' outcomes and enjoy a fulfilling family life.

Poststructuralists believe that "knowledge can be perceived differently and turned into various ways of thinking" (Wen et al., 2011, p. 555). In this sense, knowledge is not absolute and places ambiguity over research positioned in a poststructuralist stance. Taking a broadly poststructuralist stance defining my ontological and epistemological stance for the research is important.

Ontology, the study of being, is concerned with the structure of reality or what is possible to know about the world (Crotty, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003). I take a constructivist position, believing that external reality exists beyond me and that knowledge is socially constructed and in accord with poststructuralism, that meanings are produced through social interaction, with an emphasis on language (Gibson, 2017) and a series of different individual constructions of reality exist. Epistemologically, the way we look at the world and the assumptions we make about the nature of knowledge (Crotty, 1998), I take an interpretivist position. I acknowledge that researchers' perspectives and values impact the social world and vice versa, and knowledge is produced by exploring and understanding people in context (Crotty, 1998). I recognise the tensions caused by my ontological positioning, that state reality could exist beyond our consciousness, with my epistemological assumption that we make more knowledge. However, Crotty argues that to say that social reality is socially constructed in this way does not mean to say it is not real (Crotty, 1998).

My ontological and epistemological positions influence the methodological design of my study. A qualitative approach allows an understanding of the social world from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of that social world, in their own words (Gibson, 2017). I am exploring an aspect of the reality of leading a secondary school through the experiences and perceptions of school leaders who are mothers while acknowledging and privileging their different and subjective perceptions and experiences. Participants are allowed to share meanings in different ways through semi-structured interviews. My application of reflexive thematic analysis relies on my subjective engagement with the data to construct meaning (Terry & Hayfield, 2020).

Poststructural and feminist perspectives emphasise the complexity and uniqueness of women's experiences have been criticised for fragmenting research and weakening analytical focus (Anderson, 2020). To mitigate against these criticisms, I make contextualised knowledge claims compatible with naturalised empiricism based on rich narrative data collected by semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2018). The thematic analysis of the data enables a grounded production of subjective knowledge (Snape & Spencer, 2003; Terry & Hayfield, 2020).

As a constructivist-interpretivist researcher, adopting the position that knowledge is socially constructed, I recognise how my own social positioning and experiences of working as a secondary school senior leader and as a mother continually influence my construction of meaning, interpretations, and reflections, as well as those of the participants. I am currently a vice principal with two children, 11 and 13, working in a state-funded, comprehensive secondary school. I have held senior leadership roles in secondary schools for ten years in an inner-city London academy, a coastal comprehensive catholic secondary school, and an academy in a large multi-academy trust serving a deprived coastal community. My knowledge and experience of simultaneously managing the challenges of a young family and a senior leader role prompted my interest in the research question and informed the study's design.

I position myself as a woman, though I reject essentialist views of women in line with poststructuralist feminism, which discards the presumed unity in the category of "woman" by highlighting the intersectionality of identities of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Hence, I describe my social identity using an intersectional lens: I am a white, heterosexual, Western, able-bodied, middle-class, cisgender woman of

working-class origins. My social position and experience in education are important because of how they position me regarding the leaders participating in the study. An important ethical issue in relation to feminist qualitative research is how power should be handled in the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Allen, 2020). Sharing similar social attributes and educational experiences reduces the potential power imbalance, facilitating shared knowledge production (Vahasantanen & Saarinen, 2012).

Case Study Design

A case study design was chosen as it provides a unique opportunity to understand real people in real situations, allowing for a clearer understanding of ideas (Cohen et al., 2018). As the context was unique, complex, and dynamic, the case study design was chosen to explore and report real-life multifaceted factors and human relationships in a unique instance (Cohen et al., 2018) and enable readers to more easily understand how abstract ideas and principles link together (Yin, 2018).

The study presented an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) to gain insight into a complex area of concern. Stake (1995) described such case studies in this way:

> We have a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case.… Case study here is instrumental to accomplishing something other than understanding the particular and we may call our inquiry *instrumental case study.* (p. 3)

The object of the study (Thomas, 2011) that needed to be explained was the tensions and opportunities presented when combining the roles of motherhood and leadership

and the influence on women's leadership careers in English secondary schools. The focus or subject (Thomas, 2011) was 15 women headteachers and executive headteachers.

The approach used was theory building (Bassey, 1999) and descriptive rather than theory-testing and illustrative because the case did not serve to illustrate or test theory (Cohen, et al., 2018). However, in the design phase of the case study, the literature was reviewed to generate theories to assist in focusing the case study (Yin, 2018).

The process adopted was multiple cases, with each leader consisting of their own case (Cohen et al., 2018). The uniqueness of each woman's experience was preserved, and the commonality between them was explored (Cohen et al., 2018). Comparing the decisions leaders made about their careers, family, work, and work-life balance served the purpose of understanding something beyond each particular leader's experience (Thomas, 2020), showing a spotlight on the analytical issue being explored. A multiple case study is a parallel study where the cases are studied concurrently (Thomas, 2020).

The case study was set in temporal, geographical, and organisational contexts, allowing the boundaries of the case study to be drawn (Cohen et al., 2018). The case study was bounded by time (Yin, 2018). A time frame was set to constrain what can be considered part of the research method within an estimated period between July 2018 and January 2020. Although the time frame also bounded the policy context, I have also sought to draw on recent government policies and literature to illustrate current developments.

The geographical context was England, where the leaders work and live, and which bounded the evidence base, education policy, and, to a large extent, the family policy. Family policy was referred to from other European countries, where comparison of policy differences served to strengthen the generation of theory. The literature review was predominantly focused on research conducted in England, as the most relevant to the geographical and educational context in which leaders work and live. However, research at times was drawn upon from America and other European countries when there were gaps in the English research or where the literature aligned to strengthen the generation of theory related to the research questions.

The organisational context was the secondary school education system and, more specifically, the secondary schools the leaders work in and their familial relationships. The experiences that developed and influenced leaders' decisions occurred in these settings. Making sense of or developing an accurate picture of how women headteachers navigated their careers, work, and family was only possible by considering the context within which they worked and lived. Therefore, the case study excluded policy, research, and data that referred to the primary or higher education systems in England.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines the theories that informed the study's design, the development of relevant research questions, and the selection of appropriate methods. Initially, the purpose of the study is explained. Then, the themes of current

research and gaps in the literature, which inform the phenomena to be studied, are outlined. Lastly, research questions guiding the study are presented.

Purpose

The purpose of the research is to learn more about factors that influence women's leadership careers by examining how women navigate leadership and motherhood with the intention to contribute to addressing the underrepresentation of women in secondary headship. The research examines the experiences and perceptions of a previously unexamined cohort of leaders, women leaders who are mothers of dependent-aged children. Previous English studies are of primary headteachers (Bradbury & Gunter, 2006). The recommendations drawn from the research aim to support individual women and inform schools and the government on how best to support women who are mothers or who plan to be, to apply for and remain in headship positions. In this way, the research offers recommendations to address the current crisis in the retention and recruitment of headteachers in English secondary schools.

Current Crisis in School Leadership. Researchers drawing on DfE Workforce census data from 2011 to 2015 predict a substantial shortage of headteachers by 2022 (Lynch & Worth, 2017). Conclusions based on the difficulties in recruiting and retaining headteachers forecast the crisis to be worse in secondary schools (Lynch & Worth, 2017). According to recent data from the DfE, the underrepresentation of women at headship in secondary schools remains consistent over time (DfE, 2021a). Therefore, increasing the number of women applying, achieving, and staying in headteacher roles in secondary schools may present an important lever to solve the crisis.

Existing Research

A significant body of research exists on gender in educational leadership, which focuses on examining why women are underrepresentation in headship positions (Shakeshaft, 1989; Coleman, 2002; 2005; 2011; 2022; Smith, 2011a; 2011b; 2016; Fuller, 2013; 2014; 2017; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022) from which the conceptual framework to guide the research is developed. Several themes emerge from the literature:

- tensions are created by expectations of headship and motherhood in the 21st century (Coleman, 2007; Smith, 2011a; Fuller, 2013; Moorosi, 2019);

- discrimination is experienced by women in school and the application process (Coleman, 2007; Fuller, 2013; 2017; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022);

- traditional expectations of child-rearing and domestic responsibilities still exist (Coleman 2002; 2007; Fuller, 2009, 2017; Smith, 2011a; 2011b; 2016); and

- motherhood influences leadership careers (Coleman, 2002; 2007; Edge et al., 2022; Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016; Torrence et al., 2017)

The Gap in the Current Research

An emerging theme from recent studies is that the increased demands of motherhood in the twenty-first century may cause women to delay or avoid applying for headteacher roles (Edge et al., 2022). However, no previous research exclusively focuses on women leaders who are mothers and the intersection of motherhood and

school leadership. This research aims to contribute to the existing body of research on educational leadership, specifically gender in educational leadership, from an unexplored and unique perspective.

Feminist and intersectional scholars place a high value on data collected from marginalised groups (Harding, 1993), which enables underrepresented social actors' self-representation. One of the reasons is that gaps existing in society present themselves more overtly in disadvantaged groups (Harding, 1993). Importantly, the evidence from interviewing an unexplored cohort centres the research on nondominant knowledge and so holds the potential for theorising power from the experience of everyday life: "If the world is refracted through various perspectives—perspectives framed and adjusted by power—the accounts of marginalised groups are a good starting place for theorizing power." (Sweet, 2020, p. 929). By examining a previously unexplored cohort of leaders, the research aims to inform existing research on educational leadership by offering a new perspective on how leadership is enacted.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to provide a preliminary data set exploring women leaders' experiences of motherhood and leadership by exploring the question: How do secondary headteachers, who are also mothers of dependent children, perceive, experience and manage the challenges and opportunities of headship, family and personal lives? Subsidiary research questions have been drawn from the review of the literature and the YGCL study (Edge, 2014) and support the development of a better understanding of the primary question to include:

- Are there patterns in the career trajectories and experiences of secondary women leaders who are mothers?

- How do women headteachers describe their career and leadership experience?

- What are the perceived opportunities and challenges of secondary headship for women?

- What opportunities and challenges does motherhood present for secondary headship?

- What strategies do women headteachers employ to manage their work and home?

- What are the future aspirations of women secondary headteachers, and how does family influence their aspirations?

Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative approaches are often employed to conduct feminist research as they allow the uniqueness of women's voices to be heard and to make contextualised knowledge claims (Allen, 2020). Qualitative research also presents advantages for a study such as this, whose purpose is to explore under-researched phenomenon and, accordingly, the rationale and restraints on the decision-making of a cohort of women school leaders who are mothers (Creswell, 2013). Cohen et al. (2018) foreground the value of qualitative methods when the primary focus of the research is understanding how an individual perceives and interprets their lived experiences. The common characteristics of qualitative research include respect for the natural setting of the study, collecting data by interviewing people in their context, the interpretive role of the

researcher, the importance of the holistic account, and the use of thematic data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Population and Sampling: Selecting Potential Participants

The Study's Population

The overall potential population of the study was defined as women headteachers and executive headteachers with dependent children (under 18) working in state-funded English secondary schools. Two methodological arguments underpinned the population definition. Firstly, the state-funded school criteria reduced the potential number of secondary schools by roughly 40% (DfE, 2019a). Independent schools in England operated under different accountability systems and funding streams than state schools. In contrast, state-funded schools had a standard set of policies, regulations, and funding formula, making comparisons of the pressures of leadership more comparable. Secondly, England was chosen because the country had a distinct educational policy and practice framework from other parts of the British Isles. Therefore, including Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland would create additional difficulties as a study with a comparative component.

In 2018, when the sample was initially constructed, there were 3,700 secondary school headteachers in state-funded secondary schools in England (DfE, 2022d). According to the DfE census data, in 2016, the percentage of headteachers, including headteachers and executive headteachers, who were women was 38.3 %; in 2020, the percentage had risen slightly to 40.1%. This meant that in England in 2018, between 1,417 and 1,483 secondary headteachers were women. Ethnic diversity data

collected in 2018 stated that the proportion of primary and secondary headteachers from a BME background was 3.5% (Gov.uk, 2019). The figures revealed a small proportion of secondary school headteachers from BME backgrounds. The data was not broken down into ethnicity and gender. However, based on the percentage of 3.5% (Gov.uk, 2019), the number of BME women headteachers in English secondary schools alone was less than 129 in 2018.

Sample Size, Method, and Construction

A sample size of fifteen 15 was small enough of a cohort to facilitate the construction of rich narratives and in-depth explanations of complex issues (Thomas, 2020) and for each woman's unique experience to be presented (Anderson, 2020). Furthermore, the sample was sufficient for a preliminary study of how women navigate headship and motherhood.

Snowball Sampling. Snowball sampling was chosen because the sample with the target characteristics, secondary women headteachers/executive headteachers with dependent-aged children, was not commonly found or easily accessible (Parker et al., 2019). A stratified or systematic sampling technique could not be used because there was no publicly available information about the parental status of the women headteachers and executive headteachers, which would have enabled a purposeful sampling technique. Snowball sampling method was used to generate participants by approaching individuals who shared a particular characteristic of the research interest with the target population and asking them to make referrals (Parker et al., 2019). Central to snowball sampling was networking. I drew upon my professional/social

networks to establish initial links and develop from these an increasing number of participants (Parker et al., 2019).

Sample Construction. The sample was created to include both headteachers and executive headteachers. Executive and headteachers were counted as one group in DfE census data (DfE, 2022d). Executive headteachers were introduced in 2004 to be the substantive or strategic headteachers of more than one school (NCSL, 2010), more than one phase (secondary and primary), or management responsibilities beyond that of a single-phase school (Buck et al., 2017). The number of executive headteachers increased rapidly with the growth of academies and MATS. The choice was made to include both headteachers and executive headteachers to increase the size of the field from which to construct the sample. Furthermore, women were even more underrepresented at an executive level and paid less (Fuller, 2017; Belger, 2022). Examining the factors supporting women and potential obstacles facing women progressing into executive headship contributes to understanding this under-researched cohort of women.

The sample frame was considered to be across the English state-funded secondary school system, including local authority schools, centrally funded stand-alone academies, free schools, and academies, part of multi-academy trusts, to represent the experiences of women leaders from a diversity of school organisational structures.

The initial focus of participant recruitment was London and the coastal region of the southeast of England. These regions were chosen as English cities, and coastal areas were experiencing challenges in recruiting and retaining secondary headteachers

(Guardian, 2016). The intention was that the findings, even from this small preliminary study, could inform the government agenda to recruit and retain headteachers in urban and coastal regions. Also, London and the South East were likely to recruit a wide sample because they have been identified as having a larger proportion of women secondary headteachers than other parts of England (Coleman, 2005b): London had the highest proportion of secondary school headteachers, except for Birmingham (Fuller, 2009); and the South East of England and South London had the highest proportion of any region in England (Fuller, 2017).

However, the recruiting method centred on Southeast England and London yielded only five participants. The decision was then made to extend the geographical focus because it was a limiting factor in the sampling, which could be changed without affecting the validity of the sample. The cohort of leaders being studied was a minority group, further highlighted by the difficulties in recruiting participants. The geographical boundary of the case study was extended to England.

Sample Recruitment

Initially, to recruit the widest possible sample, I contacted people through professional networks I had built up working as a research associate at the Institute of Education (IOE), University College London (UCL), and as a senior leader in secondary schools in the Southeast of England and London. When this recruitment method did not yield enough participants to construct a sufficient size sample, I used Twitter to reach out directly to English women secondary school leaders. The recruitment methods I employed are described in detail below.

Professional Networks. I constructed a roster of women leaders in education from my own and my supervisor's networks, whom I contacted, asking them to make referrals to women in their professional networks. I used the following criteria to build the roster:

- they worked in London and or the Southeast of England;

- they were known advocates of women in leadership and so sympathetic to the aims of the research and more likely to help refer the study; and

- they worked with women leaders in secondary schools and had access to a population of women with the required characteristics of the sample.

I had previously collaborated in some way with each of the leaders before contacting them and gained their potential support by speaking to each of them about my research. I emailed each leader from my UCL account at their professional email address, outlining the purposes of the study and the characteristics of the participants I was looking to recruit (Appendix 1). I attached to the email a letter addressed to potential participants for them to send to women in their professional networks (Appendix 2). All the women leaders agreed to support by referring the study to women in their networks.

In addition, I made a roster of women secondary school headteachers in East Sussex working in Local Authority Schools, collated from school websites to approach directly. I sent an email from my UCL account directly to each woman headteacher in East Sussex, outlining the purpose of the study and requesting their participation if they met the criteria (Appendix 4). In the email, I also asked leaders to refer the study to women

headteachers who may be willing to participate. I attached to the email a letter addressed to potential participants for them to send to women leaders in their professional and personal networks (Appendix 2). There was a clause in the letter to say they were not required to participate, and their participation would be confidential.

In order to recruit as wide as possible a sample, I emailed CEOs of large Multi-academy Trusts (MAT) with schools in the Southeast of England, asking permission to approach women leaders in their organisations (Appendix 3). I emailed from my UCL account, the CEO of the MATs. Once I received permission, I compiled a list of headteachers in each trust who were women and sent each woman headteacher an email (Appendix 4) from my UCL account outlining the purpose of the study and requesting their participation if they met the criteria. In the email, I also asked them to refer the study to women headteachers who might be willing to take part. I attached to the email a letter addressed to potential participants for them to send to women leaders in their professional and personal networks (Appendix 2).

Twitter. To recruit a larger, national sample of leaders, I used Twitter to reach out directly to women leaders. Twitter afforded many benefits for facilitating snowballing sampling because participants could easily share the study through the retweet function to promote further participation (Lafferty & Manca, 2015). The other advantages of using Twitter included: recruiting a geographically diverse sample (Temple & Brown, 2012); accessing minority or 'hidden' populations (Temple & Brown, 2012); and the option of targeting specific networks and users in a tweet (Wasilewski et al., 2018). Although the use of Twitter as a sample recruitment method was relatively new and under-researched, several key considerations were considered and

contributed to the success of the recruitment tweets, including the content, the time the tweet was posted, and the account that it came from (Wasilewski et al., 2018).

Account. The account the tweet came from influenced my success in recruiting participants. I sent the tweet from my personal account, which had my name as its handle HortonJuliet and included a photograph of myself to increase the account's trustworthiness (Wasilewski et al., 2018).

Timing. The tweet's timing was a relevant consideration because it was likely to be viewed by users only if they looked at their feed immediately after the tweet was posted (Wasilewski et al., 2018). Therefore, I purposefully chose to post the tweet during the school holidays, as leaders were more likely to have the time to look at their feed before midday because evidence suggested that the time of the day improved engagement (Wasilewski et al., 2018). I posted the tweet (Appendix 5) on February at 9:55 on Thursday, 21st February 2019, during the half-term holidays, for English schools. The tweet was retweeted 72 times, received eight quote retweets, and was liked by 44 people. I retweeted once more on the 1st June, also during the school holidays, at 13:16. The response was not as strong: 34 retweets, two quote retweets, and 24 likes.

Content. The wording of a tweet was important as including verbs such as 'retweet' increased the likelihood of individuals taking action (Wasilewski et al., 2018). In the tweet (in Appendix 5), I included the title of the study, requested participation, and asked individuals to retweet the tweet. I included my UCL email address for individuals to contact me directly and increase the legitimacy of my request.

Social Media Networks. My tweets targeted two specific networks: #WomenEd and The Maternity Teacher /Paternity Project (MTPT). I specifically targeted these two networks as they had a following from women leaders and aspiring leaders. #WomenEd was founded in 2015 by Vivienne Porritt FCCT and six women leaders as a grassroots movement on social media. The network's purpose was to connect "aspiring and existing women leaders in education and give women leaders a voice in education" (#WomenEd, 2021). MTPT, a UK project/ charity/network, was established for parent-teachers to support and promote balancing a career in education and family.

Recruitment. Responding leaders who met the sample criteria were sent an email from my UCL account outlining the purpose of the study and requesting their participation in the study (Appendix 4). In the email, I also asked them to refer other women headteachers who may be willing to participate. I attached to the email a letter addressed to potential participants for them to send to women leaders in their professional networks (Appendix 2).

Using Twitter to facilitate the snowballing sampling method, I recruited an additional ten headteachers and executive headteachers to construct my sample of fifteen women leaders.

Participants

The table below describes the demographic characteristics of the participants. All the participants identified as white, and all but one were white British. The population of

black women in headship or executive headship was very small (DfE, 2021a). Within that figure, the proportion of women with dependent children was unknown. Unfortunately, when the population was so small, less than 129 in 2018 (Gov.uk, 2019), a nonprobability method of sampling was unlikely to recruit a sample of black women, which was a limitation of the sample construction method (Parker et al., 2019).

Pseudonym	Leadership role	School	Number of children	Leaders' children phase of education of
Susan	Headteacher	Local Authority (LA)	3	Secondary
Olivia	Headteacher	LA	2	Secondary
Isabel	Headteacher	LA	2	Primary
Sharon	Headteacher	Academy	1	Secondary
Mel	Headteacher	Academy	2	Primary and secondary
Karen	Headteacher	Academy	2	Primary
Lisa	Headteacher	Academy	2	Secondary
Ellie	Headteacher	Academy	2	Secondary
Gemma	Headteacher	Free School	1	Pre-school
Anna	Headteacher	Academy	2	Primary and secondary
Fran	Headteacher	Academy	3	Primary and secondary
Jill	Executive headteacher	Academy	2	Secondary and university
Chloe	Headteacher	LA	3	Secondary
Jane	Executive headteacher	Academy	3	Pre-school - primary
Deborah	Co-headteacher	LA	2	Secondary

Data Collection Strategy

Semi-Structured Interviews

The study employed semi-structured interviews to explore the intersection between leadership and motherhood by allowing women to share their experiences and perceptions of leadership and motherhood openly. Thomas (2017) described semi-structured interviews as the ideal data collection method to enable participants to represent themselves in their own words and generate rich narratives (Thomas, 2017). Feminist scholars recognised semi-structured interviews as an effective method to delve deeper than the surface to elucidate not only what needs to be changed but also how things could be changed (Naples, 2003). Furthermore, the poststructuralist perspective underpinning the research acknowledges the uniqueness of each woman's experiences. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the best way to explore women's views and report findings as near as possible in their own words (Naples, 2003). Also, semi-structured interviews enabled the interviewer to hear and understand what the interviewees were saying and use intonation and gesture to encourage the interviewee to elaborate further (Thomas, 2017). Finally, the interviewer could listen for nuances that could give important clues to how the participant felt about a topic. A range of open questions was used to allow the participants to represent themselves, as closely as possible, in their own terms (Casey, 1993).

As mentioned, the poststructuralist feminist perspective has been criticised for fragmenting research and thereby hindering rigorous analysis (Anderson, 2000). Semi-structured interviews helped to strengthen the analytical focus by allowing a consistent coverage of topics across the interviews and easing the comparability of the responses, which facilitated data analysis (Thomas, 2017). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews produced richer data than can be obtained from a more rigidly

structured interview (Thomas, 2017). Semi-structured interviews also reduced interviewer bias (Thomas, 2017), strengthening the findings' reliability.

Interview Tool. The interview tool, guided by the secondary research questions, is constructed into three main sections:

- Section 1: Questions explored leaders' careers, journey to headship, opportunities and challenges of leadership, and their future aspirations;
- Section 2: Questions examined women's experiences of motherhood and leadership, identifying the opportunities and challenges;
- Section 3: Questions explored the support structures women had/put in place, including the role of partners and extended family, to manage their daily routines.

The questions were clear and short in length to obtain extended informant responses (Gronn, 2007). The interview tool (Appendix 8) was developed in discussion with my supervisor, and the questions were amended accordingly. The clarity and length of the questions allowed answers to be followed up with probes defined by the preceding response. Attention was paid to avoid leading or presumptive questions.

Setting Up and Conducting the Interviews

Each of the 15 leaders was emailed a standardised email thanking them for agreeing to participate in the study and asking them to suggest a convenient time and date for the interview (Appendix 6). Attached to the email was the consent form (see Appendix

7) to be returned to me by email, electronically signed before the interview. Leaders were given the option of a face-to-face interview or telephone interview.

The different options were provided to consider the school leaders' busy work schedules and parental responsibilities. Although some qualitative researchers (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2017; Weller, 2017) emphasised the limitations of using mediated interviewing, such as video conferencing and telephone, these platforms were proven useful for interviewing geographically distant participants and participants with busy and complicated schedules (Brandy et al., 2019; Saarijarivi & Bratt, 2021). Brandy et al. (2019) found that many parents often preferred Skype because of the flexibility in timing and location Skype interviews can offer. Also, offering participants the opportunity to be interviewed by telephone or Skype assisted in recruiting a sample geographically dispersed or located in difficult-to-reach places. As I was recruiting a sample from a minority group, as I mentioned above, being able to widen the geographical focus of the sample was valuable.

Another advantage of offering participants the choice of location/platform of the interview was that participants could choose their setting, either home or work. If leaders chose to be interviewed via the telephone, they did not need to be concerned about how the space looked or need to explain the presence of an unfamiliar person to work colleagues. Therefore, giving leaders a choice meant they had more control over their own comfort and privacy during the interview. Brandy et al. (2019), in their study comparing the findings of Skype interviews and face-to-face interviews, concluded that the interview setting and the space the interviewee is in when interviewed are more influential to the quality of the data produced than the interview

context (i.e. in-person vs. Skype). Trier-Bieniek (2012) concurred that because telephone interviews allowed the participants to choose private and comfortable spaces for the interview, this interview format facilitated the sharing of personal or more stigmatised experiences. Two leaders chose face-to-face interviews, whilst 13 leaders chose telephone interviews.

To ensure the comparability of the data, the telephone and face-to-face interviews were bound by the same considerations to minimise differences (Thomas, 2020). Headteachers/ executive headteachers chose the place of their interview, a location, time, and date of their choosing. The same interview tool was used in each interview, and the length of each interview was similar, between 45 minutes and an hour long. Interviews by telephone did not result in shorter interview times (Saarijarivi & Bratt, 2021). All leaders chose term time and their office at work to be interviewed in. Most chose a time to be interviewed outside of school hours: seven leaders chose the end of the school day between four and six o'clock, five leaders chose the morning before the start of school, and three leaders during the school day.

The main concern about conducting telephone interviews by providing a physical separation between interviewer and interviewee was establishing a rapport with the participant (Weller, 2017). Furthermore, a lack of a shared environment could create feelings of disconnectedness that reduce feelings of closeness, affecting the quality of the conversation (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2017). However, I did not experience additional challenges in building rapport with participants due to the context of the interview. Firstly, the participants were highly motivated to take part in the study using phrases like "I am really pleased to be part of such an important study"

(Deborah) and "more than happy" (Jill) to be interviewed in their consenting emails, which meant building rapport with the leaders, regardless of the context, was more straightforward. Also, to build rapport, I introduced myself before the interview as a vice principal and a mother in the introductory letter. I purposefully shared my role and parental status to position myself as someone similar and to build trust with the participant. In addition, I obtained informed consent before the interviews took place, so this did not interfere with building rapport between myself and the interviewee during the interview (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014).

Regardless of the interview context, leaders were frank about circumstances they had faced in their careers and personal lives. Leaders were willing to share how changing situations in their family lives, such as divorce and pregnancy, influenced their professional lives. Leaders' willingness to share their experiences accords with the evidence that the context is less important than the setting (Brandy et al., 2019; Trier-Bieniek, 2012), and respondents can feel safe discussing personal information in mediated interviewing (Brandy et al., 2019; Glogowska et al., 2011; Vogl, 2013).

Reducing the Power Dynamics Interviews

I acknowledged that the fluid power dynamics in research interviews would add complexity to the data collection (Oakley, 2016; Miller, 2017; Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2012). Differences between myself and the participants could be problematic in terms of creating unequal power relations and discomfort, which would influence the quality of the data I collected (Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2012).

As a woman interviewing women, I recognised that shared gendered experiences, in accord with feminist research, could minimise the power dynamics (Oakley, 2016). However, I acknowledged that power relations between women exist, and social attributes other than gender also mediate interpersonal dynamics (Oakley, 2016; Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2012). For example, age, sexual orientation, and social status, plus the power positions this entails, influenced the interview situation to varying degrees (Oakley, 2016).

Sharing similar social attributes with the leaders, being a mother, white, middle class, partnered, of a similar age, and professionally successful may have served to reduce the influence of power dynamics in the interview and create a platform for shared knowledge production (Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2012). However, cultural homogeneity did not dissolve the power imbalance (Oakley, 2016). I acknowledged that being a doctoral student at an internationally recognised university possibly conferred status upon my position and that my participants were from a high professional status in the school system as headteachers and executive headteachers. I did not know or had met any of the women except one before they participated in my research. One of the leaders I had previously met briefly at a conference. Building rapport was an important strategy to minimise the power imbalance between myself and the participants (Tang, 2002; Miller, 2017).

Before the Interviews. Crucially, I recognised that the relationship-building with participants started before the recorded interview (Miller, 2017). I used several strategies to build potentially trusting relationships with my participants. Firstly, I used respected professionals or organisations as part of my snowballing sampling

recruitment strategy, which supported the establishment of potentially trusting relationships. Secondly, I also used self-disclosure as a strategy before the interview to reduce the power inequalities (Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2012). Using Twitter to recruit drew participants' attention to my Twitter profile. Although there is currently no academic research on using Twitter as a form of self-disclosure in building rapport with participants, I purposefully constructed a profile, conversed in a way, and followed people and organisations on the platform that I hoped would potentially build trust. I included a welcoming photo, which was a clear picture of my face, smiling. As a senior leader in a secondary school, I was careful to keep my communication and identity on Twitter professional because of the public nature of the dialogue and conscious of protecting my reputation and through association with my school. The people and organisations I followed were respected educational academics and educationalists, such as Dr Karen Edge, Professor Becky Francis, and Dr Deborah Chatwal, and organisations like #WomensEd, Department for Education, Times Educational Supplement, and Ambition Institute.

Before the interview, I introduced myself to each participant via email and a standardised letter as a secondary school vice principal and a mother. I was aware of how this would shape the interviews to build rapport and encourage the women to speak more freely (Tang, 2002). I found that using my shared position with the participants as a full-time working mother 'coping' shifted the dynamics to be more equal in the interview. Across the data, the overriding sense that emerged was that the leaders were able to manage their work schedules and their family lives. Also, leaders who participated, as I have mentioned before, were highly motivated to take

part in the study because they believed in the research, which helped to build rapport and encouraged the women to speak freely.

I was also mindful of how my preliminary interactions with the leader would begin to set the scene for the actual encounter (Miller, 2017). Paying attention to what Miller describes as "elusive spaces" (Miller, 2017, p. 85), the activities engaged around the recorded interview were important. Once the leaders agreed to participate in the study, I emailed 12 leaders directly to organise the timings and dates of the interview and three leaders via their personal assistants, according to the leader's preference. All email communication was sent through my UCL email address to support my academic credentials and build trust.

The interactions direct with the leaders suggested congeniality and rapport building and were important in minimising the power dynamics in the recorded interview (Miller, 2017). The exchanges with the leaders, after my initial email, on the instigation of the leader became more informal. My initial email communication with the leader addressed the leader using their full name and the formal salutation of 'Dear'. However, when the leaders replied, they chose to use a more informal salutation of 'Hi' and address me by my first name. I responded similarly, adopting a more informal style. In addition, when interview times had to be reorganised, sharing personal information and understanding managing a busy life was communicated through the email exchange. For example, on one occasion, I was unable to rearrange an interview for a time suggested, and I openly shared the reason was my daughter's advent service, which was on at that time. On other occasions when a leader needed

confirmation of an interview time because the time of the year was a busy point for her family and school, she wrote, "I am generally in a state of confusion as we try to get everyone where they are meant to be." In reply, I agreed. Emails of this nature helped to develop rapport and influence the power dynamics before the recorded interview began (Miller, 2017).

During the Interviews. Allowing the leaders to choose the context and place of the interview was a strategy I adopted to balance the power relationships (Tang, 2002). The leader was able to choose a place and context in which they felt safe, comfortable, and confident to speak in. The women were able to ensure that the interview was not interrupted, which was important in building trust through the interview and allowing them the freedom to construct continuous narratives.

Self-disclosure was also an important strategy I used during the interview to overcome differences and power inequalities (Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2012). Although I did not share my own experiences, I did, at times, express feelings to prompt rapport and encourage respondents to be more forthcoming in what they said. This took the form of offering reassurance to encourage the participants to elaborate and respond to answers in agreement, revealing my shared experience either as a mother or senior school leader. I used phrases such as "I understand" or "I know what you mean." I was aware that reassurance raises tensions and could be interpreted as collusion (Miller, 2017). I hoped I was sympathetic and reassuring without confirming or colluding, allowing the participant to unfold their story in their own words. As the interviews progressed, I developed as an interviewer and became better at enduring silences,

allowing participants to add to something further without adding reassuring comments (Miller, 2017). During the interviews, the participants talked freely about their personal lives and the intersection between their personal and professional lives. Leaders made unexpected disclosures, evidencing the rapport underpinning the tenor of the interviews. At these junctures, I was careful about the dynamic not to shift as the interview unfolded by remaining silent and letting the participant continue (Miller, 2017). Unanticipated disclosure confirmed the unknowable in advance aspect of qualitative interviewing, as well as the level of listening, responding, and care required by the interviewer (Miller, 2017). Mindful of my complex schedule as a mother of two young children and a full-time vice principal, I tried to hold the interviews in a quiet place, preferably at home and at a time I would not be disturbed and had the thinking space, to listen and respond.

After the Interview. When I completed an interview, I assigned a pseudonym to the leader to disconnect the actual leader from the data and minimise any influence the person might have on my data analysis. The presence of many of the women on Twitter meant that I remained loosely in contact with them, so distancing the person from the data was important to contribute to a more grounded theorisation of the data and conclusions (Miller, 2017).

Recording and Transcription

Each interview was taped on a digital audio recorder, as outlined in the ethics application, with the participant's permission given in writing on the consent form. At

the start of each interview, I re-reiterated that the interview was being recorded and that the participants could withdraw at any point from the interview or the research. The recordings were transcribed in their entirety by a professional transcriber, word for word.

Data analysis and coding

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify, develop, and analyse themes from the data (Clarke et al., 2017; Terry & Hayfield, 2020). The analysis was reflexive because I acknowledged that my values, experiences, and social location informed the data analysis and that I was subjectively and actively engaged with my data in relation to my research question (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Knowledge was constructed through the interaction between myself, the researcher, and the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis was built around six phases. Although the names of the phases have evolved since Braun and Clarke's (2006) article, the principles remained the same: 1. Familiarisation with the data; 2. Generating codes; 3. Constructing themes; 4. Reviewing themes, and 5. Naming and Defining 6. Producing the report (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). This approach meant that themes were constructed, tested, and refined over a series of iterative phases (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Also, using this process, themes were not groupings of data but meaningful entities constructed from codes that unified and captured recurrent meanings across the data set (Braun et al., 2018). After the first two phases, all the analysis was performed using Nvivo 12 Windows software.

Familiarisation with the Data. I was familiar with the data due to taking notes during each interview, which included details of potential patterns related to the research questions. However, familiarisation was my first opportunity to immerse myself in the data set and involved active engagement with the data as data (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). When the data collection process ended in December 2019, I printed and read each of the transcripts through the lens of the research question (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Whilst reading, I took notes about analytical ideas and questions raised on the transcript margins. These would not constrain my thinking in the later stages when the analysis was going to be done using the Nvivo 12 (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). The purpose of the first phase was to generate early and provisional analytical ideas to help develop richer codes to build higher-quality thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2018; Terry & Hayfield, 2020).

Generating Codes. After the initial familiarisation of the data, codes were generated by rereading the transcripts and looking for similarities and contradictions across the dataset (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). I implemented an open and inclusive process of coding, which involved going back through the data, clarifying, and modifying all codes relevant or meaningful to the research question (Clarke et al., 2017; Terry & Hayfield, 2020). The codes generated were meaningful on two levels. Firstly, there were descriptive or *semantic* codes, which were close to the words the leaders said and the meanings they ascribed to their words (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Terry & Hayfield, 2020). In accordance with feminist research, allowing the leaders' authentic voices to be heard was important (Allen, 2020).

Secondly, latent or interpretive codes were generated informed by my theoretical lens and literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Terry & Hayfield, 2020). An example would be 'maternal guilt' (Collins, 2021). This was not a term the leaders used. However, the code was built from references such as "I am doing an email at 8:30 pm, and I should be listening to him" and "I was always convinced that the mums who did not work were saying 'look at her turning up at the last minute'" and was an application of theory to data creating meaning (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Coarse coding was consistently applied, generating codes that captured the meaning of extracts or a section of text (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Codes were collated onto a Word document and organised according to the secondary research questions: Career History, Headship, Navigating Motherhood, and Leadership and Work-life balance. The codes and definitions of the labels were refined through periodic discussions with my supervisor.

The transcripts and codes were then uploaded onto Nvivo 12. and the coding scheme was piloted on three transcripts. Alterations were made at this stage to refine the coding process, including the labelling of the codes. The rest of the transcripts were then individually coded following the chronological order of when the interview took place. The coding process was assisted by discussions with my supervisor.

Constructing Themes. Theme development involves examining codes and associated data and gathering them into bigger, more meaningful patterns (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). The research question acted as a guide to formulate the patterns, where themes were formed that were not aligned with the research they were

discarded; themes that were anticipated from the review of the literature and aligned to the research but did not reflect data from across the whole data set (low frequency), were still included because the absence of data was worthy of note (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In line with the recommendations of methodologists in multiple case studies, themes were identified which were flexible enough to be explored across cases (Yin, 2018). The themes were constructed through a "productive, iterative, reflective process of data engagement" (Clarke et al., 2017, p. 19). On Nvivo 12 codes were clustered in each section to create possible themes that made meaningful patterns.

Interim framework: sections and main themes:

Sections	Themes
Career History	- Leadership experience - Support of career advancement - Barriers to career advancement - Career aspirations
Headship	- Opportunities - Challenges - Prejudice
Navigating Motherhood and Leadership	- Challenges of leadership for motherhood - Benefits of leadership for motherhood - Challenges of motherhood for leadership - Benefits of motherhood for leadership
Work-life balance	- Professional support accessed as a headteacher - Personal support accessed at home - Division of domestic duties - Division of child-rearing - Strategies employed to manage work-life balance - The role of technology to support work-life balance - Leisure activities/time

Reviewing Themes. In this stage, themes were checked to see if they offered the best explanation of the data and compellingly answered the research question. (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Firstly, the transcripts were reread to make sure nothing had been missed. Then, the themes were checked to ensure they were distinct and that

most codes were not allocated to more than one theme. If they were allocated to a few themes, there was a danger of 'blurriness' (Clarke et al., 2017, p. 22). In the initial analysis, codes were formulated to create themes on the opportunities of headship. However, on review, many of the same codes were clustered to construct themes on how women motivated themselves to overcome the challenges of managing the demands of motherhood and leadership. Furthermore, many of the codes used to create themes on the challenges of headship were also allocated to formulate themes on the challenges of managing leadership and motherhood.

The purpose of this research was to examine the intersection between motherhood and leadership, so themes that captured patterns in the opportunities and challenges of headship were reconstructed to formulate themes that focused the analysis more on the intersection of motherhood and leadership. Furthermore, as a result of checking the themes, some names were altered, and additional themes were constructed to improve the coherence and relevance of the analysis (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). The table below shows the final sections and themes used in the findings chapter.

Framework: Sections and main themes:

Sections	Themes
Leadership: Career History	- Leadership experience - Professional factors that support career advancement - Professional barriers to career advancement - Personal factors that support career advancement - Personal barriers to career advancement - Future aspirations
Navigating motherhood and leadership	- Opportunities and rewards of leadership - Influence of motherhood on leadership of staff - Influence of motherhood on relationships with parents - Influence of motherhood on relationships with students

	- Motherhood benefits on personal leadership effectiveness - The challenges of headship for motherhood - Opportunities leadership presents for motherhood
Work-life balance	- Positive perceptions of work-life balance - Working patterns - Negative perceptions of work-life balance - Professional support accessed as a headteacher - Influence of technology on work-life balance - Personal support accessed at home - The division of parenting labour - Household Labour - Emotional support - Rules employed to manage work-life balance

Naming and Defining Themes. Once the themes were in place, naming them (see the above table) involved succinctly articulating the central organising concept of the theme (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Defining was a more complex task and meant defining the boundaries of the theme, whether they were sub-themes, and how themes related to each other (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). The process was transferred into a notebook, where tables were constructed to explore further possibilities of mapping various patterns. Working with pen and paper enhanced my ability to identify the frequency of and relationships between each theme and how the themes worked together to construct a narrative about the data. The cluster of codes that formulated each theme was constructed into sub-themes within the theme. These sub-themes captured a distinct aspect of the theme but shared the same central organising concept (Clarke et al., 2017; Terry & Hayfield, 2020).

An example of a theme and subthemes:

Theme	Sub-themes
Professional factors that support career advancement	Senior Team experience
	Headteacher mentoring
	Women Leadership Role Models
	Mentors and Networks:

	Informal
	Formal
	Fast Track Leadership Programmes

Producing the Report

Following the completion of the thematic analysis, the report was written using the theory-building method (Yin, 2003), where the chapters follow a logic aimed at building theory to answer the research question.

Ethics

Informed Consent

Before the interviews, the research protocol was submitted to the UCL Institute of Education ethics committee, according to the guidance set out by the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018). I sought to ensure my research conformed to the laws regarding the ethical treatment of participants. Each headteacher and executive headteacher who agreed to participate, as outlined earlier, was approached by a formal invitation sent via email describing the main objectives of the study and informing them how the study would be conducted according to the ethical guidelines, and how their confidentiality and rights would be protected. A consent form was presented to each participant, outlining that they could choose to terminate the interview at any point and withdraw from the research. Each leader gave their permission to allow the interviews to be recorded by digital recording and for notes to be taken whilst the interview was taking place. The participants were asked to return the signed consent form before the interview. Participants were reassured

that names would not be available to anyone other than the researcher and my supervisor.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Strategies for storing data and protecting confidentiality were planned beforehand and included in the ethics application. Different strategies were used to reduce the risk of breaking participants' confidentiality: Digital recordings were transferred to my electronic notebook after every interview; notes avoided using the names of the participants; and transcripts did not include the participants' names. Leaders were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identities. I chose for each leader a pseudonym that was completely different from the leaders' actual names to ensure the leaders' privacy. All data was saved only using the pseudonym, including recordings of the interviews, transcriptions, consent forms, and notes taken during the interviews (all notes were typed onto Word documents). According to UCL policy and my ethics application, all electronic documents and recordings were saved in password-protected folders on a password-protected electronic notebook. Pseudonyms written with the leader's name were stored on a password-protected Excel spreadsheet and saved in a password-protected electronic notebook. Hard copies of consent forms, documents, transcripts, and written filed notes were all stored securely in a locked drawer at home. Similar care was taken in writing up the analysis; in the use of quoted data extracts, any identifying names of places or people were removed to remove the possibility of identifying participants. The actual identity of the participants was only known to the researcher and the supervisor.

Chapter 4: Findings - Leaders' Career Journeys and Future Career Aspirations

The analysis in the findings chapters is presented with a heavy reliance on the leaders' own words and the meaning that they ascribe to them, allowing leaders' voices to be heard authentically. 'Vignettes' are taken from the interviews to illustrate central ideas. However, ethical considerations have meant that some sentences and identities of people quoted in the 'vignettes' that can be connected to the participant have been removed.

To simplify the presentation of leaders' experiences and to illustrate the relative importance of emerging themes, findings are grouped into three frequency-based descriptors: high frequency describes themes that capture the experiences/reflections of 10 – 15 leaders; medium frequency describes themes that capture five to nine leaders' experiences; and low frequency describes the themes that capture one to four leaders' experiences. Most is used as shorthand to refer to high frequency, many for medium, and few for low. Low-frequency themes are included when they highlight important findings that emerge in other areas of the reporting and align with research.

The findings are divided into three chapters: Leaders' Career Journeys and Future Career Aspirations; Navigating Motherhood and Leadership; Perceptions and Management of Work-life Balance. The term leaders is used to talk about the sample as a collective. These terms are used where findings are pertinent to the headteachers or executive headteachers. This chapter begins with a summary of the participants.

Summary Profile of Participants

Due to ethical considerations, short summaries of each leader, which may make participants easy to identify, have not been included. The demographic information below draws together the commonalities and differences between the 15 participants' professional and personal profiles. Characteristics are not linked to any participant's pseudonym.

Professional Profile

Leader professional profile draws together the common characteristics of leaders' education and careers, including experience before headship, qualifications, and length of time in their current post.

Experience Before Headship*.* Most leaders are Generation X with at least 20 years of experience in education before becoming a headteacher, with at least nine years of senior leadership experience. All participants' area of expertise is teaching and learning/ curriculum and assessment, and they developed their careers through head of department, assistant headteacher, and deputy headteacher roles. Three leaders were Advanced Skills Teachers, a senior position in which the leader leads staff training within and beyond their school. The millennial participants developed their careers through a similar leadership trajectory but applied for headship at a younger age. Many leaders participating achieved headship under the age of 40.

Many leaders have had careers before becoming teachers: few leaders worked in industry and public service before entering teaching; few leaders worked in a non-

teaching role in school development and teacher education in higher education or Multi-academy Trust.

Few leaders participated on the fast-track programme Future Leaders. Future Leaders was established and funded by the government to prepare and encourage potential leaders to pursue headship to address the predicted shortages in school leaders. Future Leaders provided a formal network to support and train young leaders and was merged with Teaching Leaders in 2016 to form Ambition School Leadership.

Qualifications. All participants had bachelor's degrees and a post-graduate certificate in education. Four leaders completed the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). NPQH was compulsory for all aspirant headteachers before 2011. Three participants had Master Qualifications in education.

Length of Time in Post. Participants were headteachers, relatively new to the post at the time of the interview, and most had been headteachers for less than three years. The exceptions were a headteacher on her second headship and two executive headteachers.

Personal Profile

Leaders' personal profiles draw together common personal characteristics relevant to their family lives and influence their careers, including the generation the leader belongs to, relationship status, occupation of their partner, the number of children and the stage in their career they started their families.

Generation. Most participants are Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980. The remaining are Millennials, born between 1980 and the early 1990s. The study's design to focus on women leaders with dependent-aged children meant that all leaders were under 50 when interviewed.

Relationship status. Most participants are married to and living with the father of their children. A few leaders are in a same-sex marriage and living with their wives or separated from the father of their children and remarried or single mothers.

Occupation of partners. Many participants live in dual-income families, where their partners work full time, have similar status jobs, and have comparable salaries. Many participating leaders' partners work part-time in paid employment, and the participant is the breadwinner in these families. A few leaders' partners are not in paid employment.

Children. Most participants are mothers of secondary-aged children. A few leaders have primary and preschool-aged children. Most leaders had their children in senior leadership before becoming a headteacher. A few leaders became pregnant when a headteacher and a few started their headship when their child was one year or younger.

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings describing the career paths and future aspirations of head and executive headteachers. The chapter content is

organised around four key areas, which include 1) Leader's approach to career development prior to headship, 2) the professional factors that enabled women's careers, 3) the influence of family on women's career advancement and 4) leaders' future career aspirations. The chapter concludes by drawing together the significant patterns capturing leaders' career journeys and future career aspirations.

Career Approach: Serendipitous Career Planning

Most leaders share how they did not plan to be a headteacher; only when in a senior leadership position do most leaders consider applying for headship. For a few leaders, this lack of planning is associated with a lack of self-confidence in relation to their leadership careers, deterring them from applying for headship. However, most leaders do not perceive a lack of planning slowed their careers to headship. Their perceptions, they recognise, are influenced by their own success; taking advantage of opportunities when they arise for all participants has enabled them to reach the headship role.

Most leaders explain they did not formulate a career plan, including headship or deputy headship, at an early stage in their careers. Only on gaining a post of responsibility, often a senior leadership position, did most leaders consider going for headship. Chloe's comment reflects most leaders' perspectives: "I never really had a plan; it was never my plan to be a headteacher or setting out with that to be the goal." Similarly, Gemma states that she did not plan to be a headteacher, "I did not think about becoming a headteacher. However, there was no real barrier apart from deciding." Like Gemma, most leaders do not relate a lack of career planning to a lack of self-efficacy or a factor in slowing down their careers.

However, a few leaders are aware a fear of not being taken seriously as a woman and/or as a young woman delayed their leadership journey. Jane refers to how she had to overcome her inner voice, which told her she might be too young or not knowledgeable or skilled enough to be a headteacher:

> When I started showing prospective candidates around, I thought, "Oh, he could be my boss. Why am I not going for it instead?" That sort of thing convinced me that maybe I should go for it. It was up to the governors and panel to decide whether I was suitable for the role. Rather than eliminate myself from the process after a couple of months of "What ifs," "Maybe I am not good enough or old enough," or all the rest of it. (Jane)

Similarly, Sharon stresses how she had to overcome doubts about her own ability to present herself as a plausible headteacher, "You need to get past thinking, oh God, I cannot apply for a headteacher position, which results from doubting if you can be taken seriously and have credibility." Lisa recognises how her self-doubt postponed her application for headship. She compares herself to the men she has worked with who achieved headships earlier and who, in contrast, appeared more outwardly confident about their leadership abilities, "I am quite a tragic woman in that respect, where men think I can do that job, I was like I can do teaching and learning, and then I need to learn to do all the jobs."

Enablers of Women's Careers: Professional Factors

When leaders discuss their career journeys, two main factors emerge explaining leaders' motivations to apply for headship: the experience of working in a senior team and working closely with previous headteachers to develop their insight into the potential of headship. Secondly, most leaders highlight the importance of a prior headteacher as a mentor and role model, encouraging them to act upon their self-

efficacy to apply for headship and develop their leadership knowledge and skills. Lesser but mentioned significant factors related to the importance of women role models and the role of informal mentors in developing leadership knowledge.

Senior Leader Experience

Early in their careers, most leaders did not plan to be a headteacher; working in a senior leadership team was the factor that prompted their ambitions by providing a unique insight into headship. Firstly, the proximity to the power and decision-making of headship enabled leaders to visualise the potential of headship to bring about positive change. Realising the potential of headship was a critical moment for many leaders in fuelling their applications for headship; as Mel explains, "inspiring me in the mission and the work that we do, empowered me to be a school leader to make a difference, that helped me overcome my own nervousness or worries about applying for headship in many ways." Isabel also reflects on how her misconceptions about the role of headship and lack of understanding of its potential impact on learning deterred her early career ambitions:

> I saw headship as something much more remote from the classroom, and it took me a while to mature and see the biggest leverage in any school improvement is headship. It took me doing the job of Advanced Skills Teacher, which was kind of my ideal role, to realise the impact I could have was quite limited (Isabel)

Similarly, Lisa's frustrations at the limits of her influence in her senior role drove her ambition for headship, "I decided that I wanted to be more part of the decision-making process– that was my first step to looking for headship." Observing a headteacher role model from working alongside them in a senior team was also crucial in developing many leaders' awareness and potential of the role. Gemma identifies a previous

headteacher's role model as the decisive factor in motivating her to become a headteacher, "working under a headteacher who was very good, in an excellent school, someone who knew what headship should look like, was what got me to be a headteacher. I saw how it could be done."

Furthermore, by providing leaders with a direct insight into the role, working in a senior team enabled many leaders to act on their self-efficacy to apply for headship. Fran articulates how important gaining a closer look at headship was in motivating her to aspire for headship:

> I never set out to be a headteacher. I really did not, but then you sort of reach a point where you go, "I could do that". The closer you get to something, the more you see that you can do it, and then you are like, "Well, why do not I do that?" (Fran)

Additionally, the enjoyment that most leaders experienced in a senior team motivated them to apply for headship. Chloe explains, "I applied to be a vice principal and really loved it. Great job. And then again thought, I am not going to do this forever, and that was it. I started looking for headteacher positions."

Headteacher mentoring

Most leaders stress the importance of previous headteachers' encouragement and development of their leadership knowledge and skills in fuelling their decision to apply for headship. Fran reflects on how the guidance and mentoring from her previous headteacher enabled her career, "My headteacher at my old school mentored me and found a path for me. He said, 'Come on, you can do this.'" Many leaders articulate the importance of previous headteachers' acknowledgement of their leadership potential, as Jane shares:

A vacancy became available at my own school when I had literally only been there for a couple of terms. It was the fact that I had a headteacher who was very much, "Of course you can," that perhaps gave me the nudge to think, "Yeah, maybe I could do this." (Jane)

In their reflections, most leaders do not express a lack of confidence or ambition for headship but rather an appreciation of headteachers' belief in their leadership. Isabel's comment reflects this position; she recognises she was ambitious early on in her career but appreciates how her previous headteacher played a part in enabling her to act upon her self-efficacy to pursue headship actively:

Becoming a headteacher probably was always going to happen; I just needed to wake up and realise it. There were comments that headteachers said to me along the way that did encourage me to press on with it. (Isabel)

Also, headteachers played a crucial role, many leaders share, in preparing them when they were vice principals for headship through creating formal and informal developmental opportunities. Chloe reflects on how her previous headteacher developed her knowledge and skills by purposefully giving her the independence and power to develop a significant strategic school priority:

The headteacher at the time gave me a lot of autonomy. I developed the curriculum, ethos, and systems because I was starting from scratch, which was a valuable leadership experience. (Chloe)

Jill echoes Chloe, valuing how her headteacher developed her leadership skills by encouraging her to step out of her comfort zone:

When I decided to take a secondment, I was very nervous, but my headteacher was really supportive. He said, "You will always have a job here if it does not work out." And it was the right thing to do because it took me out of my comfort zone again and gave me fresh challenges. (Jill)

Women Leadership Role Models

Many leaders recognise the importance of women role models in shaping their aspirations. Olivia shares how working for a woman headteacher was important in confirming that women can lead: "A headteacher I worked for was reasonably defining; there was quite a lot from her that I did not want to pick up. However, she was at least a role model of a woman head, which I had not seen many of." Sharon echoes in stressing the value of observing and working with women leaders and how those experiences left her with no doubts that women can and should lead:

> I have worked for three female headteachers, two for a short period and one for a long time. I always thought that 'I could do that', whereas I know people who go, 'I will never be a headteacher'. I always reply, 'Why not? There are a lot of men leading who are rubbish, and they do not think I cannot do it.' I really think we require role models. (Sharon)

Crucially, Sharon emphasises the importance of seeing women with children lead:

> I applied to be an assistant headteacher at another school, and I got it. Again, the female headteacher had a child, which made a massive difference because she was really understanding. As long as you worked hard and did your job, she did not mind when you went home, and she never said anything; she never expected me to be in earlier. She was understanding. And that helped a lot to make me think I could do that. (Sharon)

Mentors and Networks

Although most leaders recognise the importance of mentoring in developing leadership knowledge, few leaders had access to formal mentoring earlier in their careers. Instead, most leaders' positive mentoring relationships were ad hoc rather than systemic. These leaders also highlight the value they derived from mentors being women. Isabel described the importance of an informal mentor when she was a

teacher whose personal investment in her training developed her leadership knowledge and skills:

> A local authority consultant, for whatever reason, took me under her wing. She came and did a lot of coaching with me around my own teaching and then around rolling out the national strategies. She developed me to the point where I would go and do conferences in the LA; she exposed me to a lot of opportunities. She was instrumental in my becoming an Advance Skills Teacher because she wanted to add capacity by sending me to other schools. I suppose having her is what you would call a mentor. It was not something we officially agreed on. We got on well; it was a relationship where she invested in my professional development and that partnership. I definitely benefitted from that experience. (Isabel)

Before senior leadership, many leaders recognise specific individuals' significant influence on their development. Lisa reflects on how "at every stage of my career, I can point to people, always women incidentally, that mentored and guided me at different points'.

Most leaders articulate how professional networks were unavailable to them during their careers before headship. However, Anna recognises that she would have benefitted from the camaraderie such a network can provide:

> A network was not readily available at the time, and because of that, I am involved in them now because I think they make such a massive difference in helping me to get everything in perspective of what you can and cannot do. I would have benefited enormously from that a lot earlier and for the network to be a supportive women's network as well. (Anna)

Fast Track Leadership Programmes*.* Future leader (FL) programme graduates appreciate the value of FL in supporting their development and aspirations for headship whilst teachers on the programme. As Jane comments, "The actual training and development I benefited from, coming through the fast-track route, the

additional support for the first five years, was really influential in terms of my thinking and accessing high-quality training and a network of support." Gemma also appreciates the value of FL in developing and empowering her to go for headship: "The Future Leader program was what made me think I would be able to do it. It provided me with a network, support, knowledge, and skills."

Gemma and Jane became headteachers relatively earlier in their careers after teaching for nine years. FL, therefore, appears to have been influential in encouraging them to apply for headship. Although Mel, another FL graduate, appreciates the knowledge and skills the programme gave her, she shares that network was not the most crucial factor in shaping her ambitions: "Future Leaders were wonderful bringing in people who I learned a lot from in terms of school leadership, but it did not really necessarily make me want to be a headteacher at that point." Like most leaders, Gemma, Mel, and Jane describe the mentoring and encouragement from a senior colleague as the critical factor in prompting them to decide to be a headteacher.

The Influence of Family: Enabling Career Advancement

Most leaders equally weigh the importance of personal and professional factors in influencing their career decisions. Two main patterns emerge explaining how their families' lives enabled their careers. Foremost, most leaders emphasise their partners' support and encouragement. Leaders value their partners' emotional and practical support in the home, creating space for them to focus on their careers. Interestingly, many leaders highlight how changing personal circumstances, such as a divorce or the arrival of a child, positively influenced their careers. Leaders discuss how

potentially life-changing circumstances fuelled their ambitions by enabling personal growth.

The Importance of Partnership

Most leaders stress how a supportive partner has been crucial to their career advancement. Lisa highlights her husband's important role, "I have a husband who supports what I am doing." Leaders emphasise the importance of their partner's emotional encouragement and practical help at home with childcare. Jane articulates, "I am fortunate to have a husband who very much championed my career and given me the opportunities to go for these promotions as they have arisen." Many leaders explain how their career ambitions have very much been facilitated by their husband's willingness to be an engaged parent:

> When I had the twins, we decided for one of us to stay home, and I was more ambitious than he was. It just worked for me and removed a whole host of pressure because I did not have to look at my watch for the first time to worry about childcare. I did not have to do any of that because John picked her up, which really helped. I could really focus on what I wanted to achieve professionally. (Jill)

Like Jill, many leaders' decision to apply for headship was accompanied by negotiations with their partner about their partner's involvement in paid employment. Jane describes how her promotion from senior leader to headteacher, alongside the birth of her two children, was facilitated by her husband's changing work status: "When I had my first daughter, he went part-time. A couple of years afterwards, when there were major redundancies, he voluntarily became a househusband."

Personal Growth through Changing Family Circumstances

Most leaders confirm that women's careers are closely linked to their families' lives. Significant changes in their family/personal circumstances, such as ill health, the arrival of children and divorce, substantially influenced their leadership ambitions. Although facing such life-changing events can have a detrimental effect, perhaps surprisingly, leaders explain that meeting these challenges was the turning point that prompted them to apply for a headship. Such life-changing events developed their resilience and willingness to be a headteacher. Lisa shares that overcoming mental ill health grew her self-knowledge, which motivated her to apply for headship:

> I really scared myself and thought, 'This collapse is not just physical; you need to look at the whole picture here'. My body said, 'Right, you are not listening to me; I will knock you out and make you stop.' That was a steep learning curve for me, there was not a magic wand, but I engaged with clinical supervision. I talked things through and got to know myself pretty well, which was why I knew I was ready for headship. I learnt what my weaknesses were. I now know when it is time to step back or do something for myself, and I am a massive self-care advocate. (Lisa)

Similarly, Olivia describes how she realised she was ready for headship when she was going through a divorce. Facing this challenge was empowering and demonstrated her resilience: "Probably one of the most important turning points was a personal change. When I changed my personal circumstances, I became more courageous and empowered within myself."

For a few leaders, giving birth to their first child or becoming a single mother was the turning point in their careers. These leaders describe giving birth to their child as an empowering experience and how the responsibility for a child motivated their ambition to provide greater financial security for their family. Jill's reflections on the birth of her

first child reveal how parenting and family prompted her decision to become a headteacher:

> When I had my first child, I was determined to do both (be a mother and a leader), and I decided to become a headteacher. I had to work in different ways, which was quite pivotal for me, in terms of obviously you have someone else to think of who needs you. (Jill)

When her marriage ended, Jill's determination to pursue her leadership ambitions was then motivated by the quality of life she wanted to provide for her children:

> I went through a divorce when my eldest child was a toddler, so I became a single parent, and that was massive because I promised myself and her that the quality of her life would not be worse just because I was a single parent. That gave me an inner drive to achieve more at work or go for promotions that before I might have taken a bit more time over. (Jill)

Finally, Jill reflects how facing challenges in her personal life, in particular, the arrival of her children, rather than held her back, motivated her to channel her energy into her leadership ambitions:

> Every time I experienced tragedy, my career has always done better. It is like I plugged all my energy into my work. When I returned from maternity leave, I came back into a vice principal position, but within a couple of months, I started the principal course. We had begun supporting other schools at that point, and our principal was out all the time, and we could not make decisions because he was out. We were all getting a little bit frustrated, so we just said, "We need a principal here. So that is when he took on an executive role, and I went for the job of principal. I secured the position, which was the change after returning from my maternity leave in September. (Jill)

Gemma, like Jill, describes the birth of her first child as an empowering experience, "I got pregnant, which is definitely one of the reasons I am headteacher. Motherhood gives you more confidence. It did for me, anyway. I got another perspective, and I just thought, why not?" Jane similarly describes the birth of each of her children as the prompt to re-evaluate her career, "Having my own children at each venture has made

me re-evaluate my roles, the impact I have been having and the balance that I have had. Having a child has been key each time I have changed schools or roles."

The Influence of Family: Disrupting Career Advancement

In discussing their careers, most leaders highlight personal rather than professional factors that disrupted or slowed down their leadership careers. Many leaders share how their perceptions of the incompatibility of headship with motherhood deterred them from actively seeking promotion; for a few leaders, their school experience reinforced these perceptions, causing them to resign from leadership positions. However, most leaders highlight that taking maternity leave did not hinder their career advancement.

Incompatibility of Motherhood and Headship

The perception of the difficulties combining motherhood and headship is the most significant factor many leaders believe slowed their journey to headship. Many leaders' reservations about combining motherhood and leadership after the birth of their child influenced leaders' decisions to delay or not to seek promotion to accommodate the demands of motherhood actively. Concerns relate to the long hours and demanding workloads associated with senior leader roles, including headship, which allow little time and energy to devote to parenting. For a few leaders working in a school where senior leadership expectations of workload reinforced these reservations, the school culture persuaded them to refuse promotion, step down from senior positions, or even consider leaving teaching.

Many headteachers, such as Mel, share how applying for headship until their children were older was a conscious decision based on a perception of the sacrifices that must be made in terms of their children:

> I would not have applied to be a headteacher when the children were younger; I did not feel I wanted to make that much of a sacrifice. We both felt ready for me to do headship when this role came up, and I felt excited about it and really wanted to do it. I could make a difference here. The decision involved lots of family conferences, and we agreed on it. We got there in the end, and it worked out. (Mel)

Lisa also delayed applying for headship due to having children, "I would have gone for headship sooner had it not been for the fact I had children." Like many headteachers, Lisa felt reluctant to go for promotion whilst pregnant, nervous about managing a more demanding role alongside motherhood. Lisa turned down a promotion to work in the senior team, delaying her career advancement:

> I was invited to be an associate on the Senior Leadership Team, which I initially accepted, and then turned it down because I fell pregnant. I decided I did not want to take on additional responsibility, as I was unsure how I would feel. But as it happened, I was back at work quite soon after, put my child full time in the nursery, and that position had then gone. (Lisa)

Similarly, Fran discusses how decisions about her family meant that she remained in one school, where a sense of familiarity made the demands of work more manageable, rather than seek out other external opportunities that would build up her knowledge and skills:

> The reason I spent a very long time at my third school was because I had all my children while I was there. I was the best part of sixteen years in one school, and I moved up the operation. Essentially, what I would not have done if I did not have children, I would probably have moved around a lot more if I did not have children. (Fran)

Participants confirm that working in schools with working cultures requiring long, inflexible hours and offering little support for staff to manage workload reinforces women's reservations. For a few leaders working in such schools, this meant avoiding promotion, taking a position with less responsibility and even considering leaving the profession. Deborah describes how the arrival of her children slowed down her career advancement. The demands of her workload and lack of support to work differently meant she decided to work part-time, and then, after her second child, she resigned:

> I was assistant head for about eight years because I had two children. I spent quite a long time as an assistant headteacher, actually three separate assistant headships, mostly because I had the children. I had one child in my first assistant head role, and I went part-time. There was no job sharing. Rather foolishly, I was not offered one and did not think to ask for one. I did that for two years and then had my second daughter. At that point, I realised two children under two and doing an assistant headship, five days' work in three days, was not really working, so I resigned. (Deborah)

Jane similarly explains how a school's uncompromising approach to workload led her to step down from senior leadership and seek another position:

> There was no way I could feel effective in any of my roles as a mother, assistant headteacher, or head of English. I went to see my headteacher and said, "Look, I am a hard worker, but this is untenable. Is there any way that I can relinquish my middle leadership role so that I can feel as though I am having a better quality of life and be able to feel job satisfaction?" And unfortunately, at the time, the answer was, "Well, no. There is no money; there is no capacity. You are just going to have to carry on doing all of that." This attitude made me think I was going to move sideways. I would find a job where I would feel like I was doing it well because I was not willing to sacrifice my sense of job satisfaction nor my ability to feel like I could have some semblance of work-life balance with a baby at home. (Jane)

Like many headteachers, Jane articulates an unwillingness to make "sacrifices" related to her children, job satisfaction or well-being. Sharon reflects on the sacrifice to leaders' well-being of working in a school culture that makes no accommodations

for the demands of parenting. Sharon details how returning to school and working to the same expectations as before the birth of her child was detrimental to her health:

> I spent six months as a deputy headteacher in two different schools. I found that hard because when I went back into the leadership team after the birth of my child, there were no allowances. You had to be in for seven thirty meetings and be in school still for eight o'clock pm. There was no understanding that you had a life or that things might be happening. I found it difficult and became quite ill, to be quite honest, at that time, with the expectations. (Sharon)

Finally, Isabel describes how the senior team's approach towards their own and teachers' parenting responsibilities deterred her from even aspiring to senior leadership:

> I have to say this diplomatically. The school was quite negative – the senior leadership was not anything I wanted to aspire to – it was definitely a negative bullying type of culture. At that point, I was pretty anti the idea of entering senior leadership. I applied to leave early on a Friday to get my daughter, see her teacher, and get to the school at three thirty. I would have had to have left at three o'clock from my school and was told no. A part-time request to go back at four and a half days was turned down. It was offered to me at one point, but only if I stepped down onto the scale below. There were some quite negative experiences I had in that school. (Isabel)

Leaders identify that experiences that create overt or implicit messages that parenting/motherhood and leadership are incompatible demotivate women teachers and disrupt women's leadership careers by making serving senior leaders avoid promotion, relinquish their leadership roles and even consider leaving the profession altogether.

Maternity leave penalty

Most leaders do not identify maternity leave as a factor that influences their career development. A few leaders cut short their maternity leave by a few weeks. As

breadwinners of their families, shortening their maternity leave was determined by financial implications rather than concerns about the impact taking maternity leave may have on their career trajectories. Furthermore, few leaders express guilt or worry about taking maternity leave.

The career stage at which leaders take maternity leave may influence how women feel about taking leave. A headteacher describes the difference between taking maternity as a headteacher and previous roles. However, she adds that her concerns were unfounded:

> Being pregnant as a headteacher is interesting because this time around, the guilt I felt was even worse than the guilt I felt when I fell pregnant previously. You just feel so responsible when you invest so many hours of your week committing to a job. It is not the same as teachers on maternity; you replace them with a supply teacher. With the headteacher, it is quite a different prospect. I was quite nervous telling the staff that I would be off, and I felt quite guilty about the senior leadership team having to step up in my absence, but people have been great. I probably should not worry so much.

In all cases, leaders' partners took the two weeks paid statutory they were entitled to.

Future Career Aspirations

Most leaders intend to stay in their current position. Current job satisfaction is the main reason most leaders identify to explain their career aspirations. Also, many leaders attribute a lack of future career planning to their newness in post. When leaders look forward to future positions, many identify promotion within their Trust as the most attractive option. Most leaders recognise family as the most significant factor in determining their next steps, predominately limiting where they could work. For a few leaders, their partner's career influences their career decisions.

Job Satisfaction

The satisfaction most leaders gain from their leadership role and a strong attachment to their school explains their intentions to stay in their position. Karen's pride and affection for her school reflect the contentment of many leaders, "I adore my school. I am happy getting to the position I got at my age. I love my job, and I will retire in this position, whenever that is." Chloe echoes Karen's contentment, which justifies her plan to retire in her current post:

> I do not see myself moving. I see this being the job I stay in until I retire; I am 48 now. I have no ambitions to move up or to be a headteacher in a different school. I am happy to be here and hopefully take this school forward. (Chloe)

Many leaders, relatively new to the post, feel too absorbed with the responsibilities of their current role to consider the next steps. They have a job to complete first. As Isabel articulates, "For me, I cannot really see beyond this at the moment anyway.' Fran agrees, "I feel like I am still quite a new headteacher, and there is a long job to do in my school. It does not feel like I want to do anything else yet".

The few leaders considering their next career move are strongly satisfied with their current roles. Their approach, to wait for opportunities that arise in their present organisations rather than seek out promotion for career advancement, mirrors their career approach before headship. Jane expresses how she will gauge the opportunities that arise during negotiations of the expansion of the Trust she works within, "I have not got a plan as such, but there will be negotiations with the new Trust when the merger takes place in the new year." Similarly, Olivia is happy to take on

opportunities that may emerge but is not actively seeking promotion, "This is a big school. I will be here for some time. But there are the inevitable conversations about Trusts, and if that brings another step, so be it."

While no leaders are seriously contemplating looking for an executive headship, Isabel considers that executive headship is the next logical step. However, she does not see it as desirable at the moment, "when I think what is beyond headship and I think about an executive headship, it does not have a massive appeal."

Family and Future Career Development

Considerations about family, for most leaders, are the most significant factors shaping their ambitions and next career steps. Jill stresses: "My family will always be a part of my decision-making because it will affect the family unit whatever decision I make." Crucially, most leaders explain how thinking about what is best for their family imposes geographical limitations on their choices. As Ellie shares:

> My family are important regarding location and where I would be prepared to live -how far away from them. I certainly have not gone for jobs or promotions where I thought it would put my family life at risk. I have not done that. And I will continue not to do that. (Ellie)

Most leaders' applications for new positions need to be near where they currently live because they are reluctant to move their family, disrupt children's routines and education, or lengthen their commute, meaning less time at home. At the same time, leaders are aware of and accept the limits location puts on their careers. As Susan

explains, 'They do not want to move, and I would not move them. The biggest restriction for my career is that I am tied to the location that they want to be in."

Leaders' concerns about their children's educations are crucial to many leaders' considerations about their next career moves. For a headteacher whose children are primary-aged, choosing a secondary school will affect her decision about her career:

> Will I stay here until they are grown? That affects my decision-making, and do I want to stay in London until they are grown up? The decision of where we will live and where they will go to school affects my career.

Fran's reflections on parenting secondary school-aged children reflect leaders' comments with similar-aged children about the reluctance or inability to move their children's schooling:

> We will have a child in year nine next year, which limits you because they will start going through the stage in school where you do not want them to move. You need to stay still because they need to do GCSEs and A levels and have friends and a good social life. So, that limits me. My children always come first. I will never stick my children in the middle, moving them in year ten or something. (Fran)

For a few leaders, their partners' careers and locations put geographical limitations on their career aspirations. For example, one headteacher explains when her partner leaves the armed forces, they will reconsider where they live, "If my husband comes out of the navy in the next few years, we could relocate to Bristol, so I would need to look at what I would like it to be around the Bristol area." Ellie, who is no longer living with the father of her children, values the relationship that the children have with him and so would not move further away:

> I am location-bound because my ex-husband is in the local area; when I was looking for headships, I was lucky that one came up in the locality. If things had been different, for example, I was still married to the father of my children, we

might have moved away. But now it would mean that either of us would always be on the motorway, or the children would not see their dad. That affects my decision making quite a lot. (Ellie)

Most leaders explain how they have completed their families and no longer need to consider the implications of taking maternity leave and the complexities associated with newborn babies on their career aspirations. For a few leaders who are planning to have another child, timing the pregnancy is complex and an important factor influencing career decisions, as Gemma explains:

I want to have another child; that is the biggest issue, and it is really hard. I do not really know when it is the right time to do that. That is the next step really for me. Ofsted is coming next year, and the school is settled, but there is more planning and a few things that need to be done. I would like another child after Ofsted has been—just one more. But I do not know. I do not really think past having another child. I always thought, "I will do headship and see if I am any good at it, and if not, I get to have another child anyway" (laughs). It all works out. But the headship is going well, which has made it difficult now because it means I have to choose to have the child. (Gemma)

Reflections on Career Journeys and Future Aspirations

A serendipitous journey best describes leaders' progress to headship. Leaders explain how they developed their careers by taking advantage of opportunities when they arose rather than purposefully planning and seeking out leadership development and experience. However, the language leaders use does not suggest that a lack of confidence or self-efficacy explains their career approach.

Two important professional factors are highlighted as shaping leaders' leadership ambitions: senior team experience and mentoring from previous headteachers. Working in a senior team alongside a headteacher enabled the realisation of the potential of headship to bring about positive change and the development of

leadership knowledge and skills, which empowered leaders to apply for headship. Although few leaders benefited from formal mentoring or networks, the potential of mentoring, especially for aspiring women leaders, is recognised; many leaders point to someone or a programme such as FL who inspired or informally mentored their leadership knowledge and skills earlier in their careers. Women role models are identified as important in reaffirming that women can and should lead.

Equally as important as professional factors are personal factors. Most significantly, leaders foreground the emotional and practical support from home; a partner championing their career is significant. Not only is encouragement from their partner important, but their partner's practical involvement in parenting and running the household allows leaders more time and energy to focus on their careers. Also, familial and personal factors many leaders describe as empowering and persuading them to act upon their self-efficacy to apply for headship. These personal experiences include divorce, becoming a mother and ill health.

The most significant barrier that slowed leaders' careers was perceptions that the demands of the headship and motherhood were incompatible. Crucially, leaders describe their reservations about combining motherhood and headship, encouraging them to move sideways or not apply for leadership roles to accommodate parenting responsibilities. The incompatibility of mothering and leading was confirmed for leaders who worked in school cultures that were not flexible in accommodating parental responsibilities. Taking maternity leave was not identified as a barrier, and leaders share no concerns about the impact that taking maternity leave has had on perceptions of their agency and commitment.

Current job satisfaction means that leaders are content in their current role, promotion within their present organisations being the only consideration. Aspirations are limited by geography, prioritising the interests of their children; leaders are reluctant to work or seek to work in locations, which would mean disrupting children's schooling, social groups and a long commute. In contrast, partners' careers have a minimal influence on leaders' careers. Where leaders have completed their families, considerations about the timing of a child and career aspirations are no longer significant; however, for a few leaders who have not, the timing of a pregnancy, as headteacher, is influential on the leaders' careers.

Chapter 5: Findings - Navigating Motherhood and Leadership

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings on leaders' experiences of mothering and leadership. Specifically, it focuses on the intersection between motherhood and leadership and how both influence the other. The content is organised into four key areas, which include 1) the rewards of leadership, 2) how mothering strengthens the enactment of leadership, 3) experiences of prejudice 4) opportunities and challenges of headship for mothering. Leaders' observations of leading whilst mothering do not reveal the drawbacks of mothering for leadership; however, most women in their current roles have experienced prejudice relating to their gender and motherhood, which are included in this chapter. The chapter concludes by drawing together the significant patterns to reflect on how leaders navigate motherhood and leadership.

Leadership: Rewards

When reflecting on their leadership, two patterns emerge explaining leaders' motivations to be headteachers whilst mothers of dependent children. Most leaders share a strong moral purpose, which underpins their leadership and translates into a commitment to improving students' social mobility and staff well-being. Therefore, the value leaders derive from implementing a school vision and enacting leadership with students and staff at the centre compensates for the professional and personal challenges they may encounter.

Accelerating Student Social Mobility

Most leaders highlight that the rewards of headship lie in the power to influence the community positively and enable social mobility. Driven by a strong moral purpose, most leaders appreciate the opportunity that headship provides to shape and implement a personal vision for their school, as Deborah explains:

> The greatest opportunity is to influence children's lives and make an enormous difference to their educational outcomes, their life chances and what they are going to go on to do after school. That opportunity is for us, particularly in my school and our area, to change their lives and show them there are people who care and look after them, is massively important. Enabling social mobility for a lot of our students and providing a chance they would never have had motivates me. (Deborah)

Karen agrees, explaining how she is motivated by positively changing the lives of her students:

> The opportunity to support young people to make better progress, achieve better outcomes, be more curious about learning, be more independent, and be more reflective is exciting. The influence we have as headteachers is incredible and pretty immeasurable in lots of ways. (Karen)

Many leaders choose to lead schools in socially and economically disadvantaged areas. They are determined to make a difference in the lives of the young people in their schools and the communities the pupils come from. Like most leaders, Isabel describes school leaders' power to drive social mobility: "As an immense privilege." Leaders' use of words such as "privilege" and "honour" emphasises how highly leaders regard opportunities to lead positive change in their communities. Mel articulates, "It is a huge privilege to serve the kind of community that we serve here, getting to know and understand children and their families. I am really inspired by that every day." Anna agrees, describing how privileged she feels to be the headteacher at her school:

> You can offer things to the community that they would not have without you. This is just one of the most precious jobs you can do. I feel privileged to do it. I cannot imagine doing anything else, really. (Anna)

Anna's language shows a keen awareness of the value her school leadership can add to the community her school serves. Aligned with other leaders participating, communities that are often perceived by some as challenging fuel rather than diminish Anna's motivation to lead. Karen describes the "honour" she feels as a headteacher because of the power she holds to improve the opportunities for her school's community: "The opportunities are the influence that you have to make the weather for your community on a daily basis, which is an absolute honour and not to be underestimated." An executive headteacher highlights how positions beyond headship provide even greater opportunities to influence change: "The opportunities you get are to transform those schools where children were literally out of real encouragement."

Believing that school leadership is an honour motivates most leaders to accept the toll of the responsibility even when trying to manage the challenges of motherhood and leadership. Isabel, who explains how she finds the responsibility of headship a burden and makes personal sacrifices in her family life, articulates how important her belief in the privilege of leadership is in motivating her:

> I feel it (headship) is a privilege, even on days I find it hard. It is such an opportunity to be able to shape something. In converse to all that responsibility, you have high levels of autonomy. Certainly, I do broadly speak. I am left to shape the school and the direction of the school exactly as I want to. It is a massive opportunity to shape something and to lead something in the true sense of the word. It is a huge intellectual and political challenge every day and is very invigorating and energising when it is going well. (Isabel)

Staff Well-being and Development

Headship presents the opportunity to implement a school vision that places staff development and well-being at heart. The power to implement such a vision is important to many leaders, as Olivia articulates:

> The opportunity of headship is to be able to deliver the vision of headship that you have. To be able to work with people - bringing about the best in other people. It is that delivery of a vision, which you get a chance to deliver at deputy headship, but it is much bigger and broader at headship. (Olivia)

Leaders articulate how the evolution of their leadership with a greater focus on staff well-being and development is influenced by their own experiences in senior leadership. Bringing out the best in their staff is an emerging theme. Karen echoes:

> The opportunities are to create a culture for your staff where they know they are trusted and valued. Learning from your career the things you disagreed with, where you have thought, "Right. When I am a headteacher, I am going to make sure that staff are trusted to teach." I worked in a culture that was obsessed with observation, monitoring, and book scrutiny. We are creating a climate in our school at the moment where there is this real sense of professional trust. Performance management and an appraisal system are stripped back to where it is based on teachers teaching, loving teaching, and students being inspired by teachers who are at the top of their game. (Karen)

An emphasis on professionally developing staff is important, as Anna articulates:

> I want to lead in a way to influence adults starting out in careers in school to support them to be the best they can be, turn the corner effectively at work, and ensure that people have their career plans and can fulfil their potential. (Anna)

Ellie highlights the rewards:

> The opportunities are massive, and there are massive rewards, such as growing people into leadership positions, seeing them be better than they thought and helping them to develop and train the next generation of leaders. Just to give people opportunities and see them take and grab them. (Ellie)

Jill echoes, "I see staff who have not had any investment blossoming and flourishing, which is quite special." Finally, most leaders also commit to improving staff well-being by helping them to establish a healthy work-life balance. As Mel articulates:

> One of the things I love about being headteacher is we can create different ways of working. We are still very much a work in progress, but I believe for us to become a truly outstanding school, we have to be a sustainable school. I, as well as the staff, have a work-life balance that makes us happy, that makes us want to come in and be happy at school. (Mel)

Mothering: Strengthening the Enactment of Leadership

Leaders overwhelmingly reflect upon the positive ways that mothering has informed their headship. Firstly, most leaders share how, drawing upon their negative experiences of juggling leadership and mothering, as middle or senior leaders, they develop practices and policies to reduce conflict between family and work and establish more family-friendly school cultures. Being a mother and headteacher provides additional insights to support all staff's work-life balance. Most leaders also recognise their importance as women and mothers, acting as role models in their schools for women. Secondly, most leaders articulate how mothering strengthens their enactment of leadership by increasing their empathy with parents and students, thereby strengthening relationships. Lesser but mentioned significant findings relate to how becoming a mother increases leaders' personal efficacy by improving their organisational skills and motivation for work.

Learning from Non-Family-Friendly Schools

Leaders' negative experiences as middle or senior leaders whilst parenting pre-school children influence their practice and approach to headship. Difficult decisions on prioritising work or family heighten their awareness of the impact of certain leadership decisions and practices. These practices include poor timing of meetings, which clash with childcare provision and parental duties; blanket refusals of staff requests to attend children's events such as sports day; and refusals to requests to look after a sick child. Two leaders detail how headteacher inflexibility can create conflict between work and family for a parent and inadvertently slow the career advancement of women leaders.

Whilst a middle leader Isabel's toddler was seriously ill and hospitalised. After the first day, the headteacher called her and asked her to return to work and arrange for someone else to monitor her child's condition. The pressure on Isabel to decide to agree to the headteacher's demands or to refuse and risk their displeasure meant she seriously considered not only giving up her job but also leaving a career in education. Isabel decided to leave the school, even though her senior role was her ideal role at the time.

Lisa retells how her ambitions to be a headteacher were reduced by her experience as a senior leader, which knocked her confidence. She explains how senior team meetings often overrun, meaning she had to leave meetings early to collect her child from the nursery. When she was absent, decisions would be made; being excluded from decision-making in this way left her feeling her input was unnecessary and undervalued. Lisa talks about how constantly feeling unappreciated left her questioning whether senior leadership was the right career for her and deterred her from seeking further promotion.

Experiences of juggling careers and mothering considerably inform most leaders' drive to establish family-friendly staff cultures in their schools, consciously choosing to lead differently and implementing structures and policies that minimise conflict between family and work. As Isabel articulates, "I consciously try not to replicate the experiences I have had." Anna echoes Isabel's commitment to leading differently:

> I was working for a headteacher who would not let you have the time with your family, and that was one of the things that I was keen I would not replicate. For example, it was my daughter's birthday, and I was told I could either go home straight after school and come back for the very late meeting or do the meeting after school and then not get home until late. And that was it. There was no, "Of course, family's first! (Anna).

Ellie agrees her insights gained as a senior leader whilst mothering influence her to lead more flexibly and sympathetically:

> I was in senior leadership team meetings looking at the clock because I had to leave to collect the children from nursery. I was the only person who had to do that. I felt unprofessional about leaving. I felt that kind of thing was difficult, which Influenced my view on leadership because it made me angry. I was determined not to put other people through that. I know how hard it is. I am much more the sort of person who says I know how hard it is; how can I help? If I had asked that at the same point for help, I would have got a no. (Ellie)

Establishing a Family-Friendly School

Drawing on their experiences of mothering, most leaders consider the following actions to be important in establishing a family-friendly school culture: 1) Developing a human face to leadership, 2) leading with empathy, 3) accommodating family commitments, 4) accommodating flexible working and 5) helping staff achieve a healthy work-life balance. In creating a family-friendly school culture, most leaders

commit to leading schools where staff do not make sacrifices in their family life to fulfil leaders' expectations and where leadership actively minimises possible conflicts that can arise between the demands of family and work.

Developing a Human Face to Leadership. Many leaders perceive positive shifts in their relationships with staff members due to their mothering. Being a parent bolsters their confidence to share stories about themselves with staff and parents that show a more human side. Sharing stories about their children confirms positive leadership qualities, which helps improve how staff regard leaders. Stories about their children are a meaningful way to connect with staff because leaders present themselves as 'real'/ 'human'. Mel articulates, "Training staff and talking to staff about the challenges or experiences I have with my own teenage son makes me much more real. It is a benefit." Deborah echoes this feeling of staff perceiving her as more human because she has clear priorities beyond school, such as her children. The image of her as a mother stands in contrast to the perception of the headteacher, as ambitious and with a sole focus on their career – a perception that can alienate staff with different life priorities:

> I have worked with headteachers who do not reveal any of their personal information or only seem to be focused on the job outcomes and targets. You do not trust anyone like that. Nobody would get the best out of me like that. (Deborah)

Deborah notes how her mothering confirms her possessing certain qualities such as being caring, a good listener and empathetic. Being a mother for Deborah, like Mel, improves the followership of staff as Deborah articulates, "Staff see you as a real person who understands. I am also quite a good listener, but they know that because I have children."

Leading with Empathy. Additional insights into the challenges of balancing a career and parental responsibilities encourage most leaders to adopt a more personable and supportive approach with their staff. Firstly, leaders feel they can empathise more with staff who are or are about to become parents. Karen reflects on how having children changes her perspective and, hence, her leadership:

> For me, it did make a difference having children. Without children, I was on a path where I thought I understood people with children but did not as a leader and manager. Getting married and having children changed my leadership style unimaginably. In a good way. (Karen)

Fran shares how their insights into mothering have emboldened her to have conversations with her staff about their parenting decisions and experiences:

> It is really nice that you can say to staff, "I know what it feels like to be 32 and having your first child or your second one and feel like you are going under." It helps to have that sort of empathy with where they are is important because they work so hard those people. (Fran)

Furthermore, leading with empathy manifests itself as a personable style where leaders recognise taking an interest in their staff is important. Isabel explains how getting to know staff is an important aspect of her leadership:

> I also ask about their children and how they are, your husband or your mother. It is important to be personable. It is an important quality of leadership. To know your staff well and to understand the challenges that they are facing. (Isabel)

Most leaders believe building connections with staff enables them to flourish and grow. Deborah articulates, "When you are personable, and you take an interest, you do get the best out of people."

Accommodating Family Commitments. Most leaders recognise that family illness and caring responsibilities for school staff can be incredibly stressful because of rigid structures and policies. Leaders support their staff in these circumstances by offering understanding and allowing staff to take the time they need or flex their work. Sharon outlines her approach to flexing work, drawing on one specific example of when a senior leader had a sick child:

> I am very different from anything that they are used to. One of my senior leaders has a toddler. She rang me at six this morning to say she had been vomited all over but would come in. I said, "Do not be so ridiculous. Stay at home. Use a laptop. You are not coming in for one day. It is fine. (Sharon)

Anna agrees that allowing staff to prioritise their caring responsibilities is essential, "Absolutely, 100% family is first! And if anything has come up, and caring responsibilities for older relatives, partners, children, with the family - absolutely! That has been the centre of everything I have done." Ellie echoes Anna's commitment to supporting her staff:

> I hope to help people teach, lead, and manage family circumstances– including caring for family members. One of my senior leaders is a carer for her mum – it is not a lot different from caring for a parent as caring for a child. (Ellie)

Schools often have inset days at different times, which can cause childcare dilemmas for teachers. Olivia shares how she supports parents by allowing them to bring their children into school, "If I have got a member of staff who has a problem because they have no childcare, and they have got an inset day, and ask can if they can bring their child in, long as they do their job, that is fine." Susan tries to find out more about the challenges her staff face so she can offer support, for example, by giving them the time they need to carry out their family responsibilities:

One teaching assistant staff member said that her mother had to go to the hospital for an operation, and she could not drive. Would I mind if she left 15 minutes early to pick her up? She had emailed me. So, I said come and speak to me. It transpired that she was the only one caring for her, so I said take the day off. That is how I try and be. (Susan)

Leaders' previous experience working in schools whose policies prevented them from attending their children's events, including sports days and nativity plays, prioritise accommodating similar staff requests. Leaders believe that allowing teachers to take time to attend their own children's events is an important aspect of creating a family-friendly culture. Having their own children helps them appreciate the importance of being present at key moments in their children's lives. Susan articulates, "My staff know that if they want to go out, they can go because you do not want to look back and miss out on your children." Chloe shares how becoming a mother has heightened her empathy for the importance of attending these moments in a child's life:

We have many staff members who have children of their own. I can also talk with other mums, in particular, to those who are juggling children and teaching and workload and understand. It means that I understand when they desperately want to see the Nativity or watch a sports day, or they have got an ill child. I get that it is important for them to be there, so it (motherhood) gives me that level of empathy for the other parents in school. (Chloe)

Ellie highlights the importance of accommodating similar requests through her willingness to cover for the teacher if no alternative cover can be organised:

I am much more the sort of person who says I know how hard it is. How can I help? For example, one of the teachers asked if she could see her daughter at the reception's award assembly. I covered her lesson. I will try and make it work. Only if it is not physically possible will I say no. (Ellie)

Accommodating Flexible Working. Leaders learn from their own experience of mothering and leading to ensure women make informed leadership decisions about flexible working, especially before going on or returning from maternity leave. Drawing upon their own experiences, leaders are aware that women can often worry about meeting unrealistic expectations they set themselves at work and as mothers during these periods. Jane shares one such instance in recounting her advice to a new mother:

> I was coaching someone the year before last who was doing an assistant headship in a primary school but was pregnant and a complete work-acholic and had already sort of said to herself, "I am going to have to take a career break. There is no way I can be a good teacher and mum." I said, "You just need to wait and see. I would not make any rash decisions. Just bide your time. You do not have to confirm anything. Take as long as you feel you need off, but do not hastily make those decisions now." She relinquished her assistant headship but decided to return to teaching and is working full-time now. She later sent me a message saying, "Thank you for that advice because I was so caught up in thinking either I have got to be a 100% brilliant mum or 100% brilliant teacher, and I could not rationalize the two." And then she sent me another message, "I wish I had not given up my assistant headship either. (Jane)

Jane explains the importance of helping women to recognise how to adapt and adjust working schedules before considering flexible working:

> There are so many times when the women I work with say, "Well, if I am going to do something, I am going to do it really well, and that is just my pitch." It is just so debilitating if they play this expectation of perfection while neglecting the fact they are a parent. Many women try to do a day job as if they did not have children. The plans and routines they used to have, do not work anymore, but no one is sitting down with them and saying, "Come on, this is how you need to try and adjust your life to fit. It is about making those adjustments. (Jane)

Furthermore, many headteachers, like Isabel, express a commitment to accommodating flexible working, "I try as much as I can to support part-time and

flexible working requests. I try to support when people have medical appointments and make those things as easy as possible within the boundaries of practice."

Helping Staff Achieve a Healthy Work-life Balance. Most leaders highlight that being a headteacher whilst mothering increases their empathy for the challenges of managing a healthy work-life balance and motivates them to lead with regard to supporting all staff in establishing healthy working patterns. As Jill articulates:

> I am more empathetic. You realize how important it is to other teachers to have a proper work-life balance. You need to give teachers the space and the time. Teaching as a profession has become so absorbing, and the narrative around workload and stress is worrying, not just for people who are parents. I have people I work with, and I can see the signs that they are too committed to their jobs in an unhealthy way because they do not have a family. They almost feel obliged to spend every waking hour doing work. And that is not okay either. I need to do more work around work-life balance. The culture is where you are just willing to sacrifice yourself and your personal time. "Whatever it takes" can be a bit toxic. (Jill)

Mel's description of her school vision puts creating a sustainable family/working balance at heart:

> What I want to do is create a school where mums and dads can do great work in schools and be parents in a functioning way. I did not have those role models when I was a younger teacher, and I want to create and sustain that for parents in school today. (Mel)

Most leaders share how their experiences of mothering and leadership motivate them to offer all staff more support in achieving a healthy work-life balance.

Being a Role Model to Women Teachers and Leaders. As headteachers and mothers, they are aware of being in the minority of secondary school headteachers and executive headteachers. Role modelling how leadership and motherhood can be

compatible is important to them. Jane articulates, "I had a one and a two-year-old when I started headship. People were pleased that somebody was prepared to be that role model for other people - that it is possible." Isabel's similar experience highlights the importance of role models:

> Lots of female teachers in the school, like I have young children, have commented that they have never worked for someone who has and have been impressed with how it works. I have had lots of conversations with younger female staff. (Isabel)

In addition, leaders recognise that as a mother, they hold a position of credibility from which to have conversations with women considering their future senior leadership roles. As Olivia comments:

> I know there are female leaders, particularly female middle leaders, who I think should be headteachers one day. I can see them making a decision. I can talk to them and say, "That is fine. Have your children. Do it. It does not mean you cannot do these other things as well if you want to." It helps them to see that. (Olivia)

Most leaders agree that in acting as role models to women teachers and middle and senior leaders, the sustainability of combining headteacher and mother roles is influential in encouraging women to step up to leadership rather than be deterred.

Building Stronger Parental and Student Relationships. Most leaders believe being a mother strengthens their relationships with parents, engaging parents more positively in their child's education. Drawing on their mothering experiences informs leaders' appreciation of the demands on other parents, which helps them connect more closely and establish trusting relationships. Many leaders believe increased empathy with parents develops their confidence to diffuse parents' anger in challenging meetings and situations, bringing parents back on their side. Also, leaders

feel that positioning themselves as parents rather than just as the headteacher minimises the power dynamics, making them less threatening to parents.

Strengthening Parental Relationships. Most leaders discuss how, as mothers, they understand more wholly the child-parent relationship, which improves their empathy with parents. As Gemma articulates:

> Motherhood gave me a perspective I never had before, making me a lot more empathetic to parents. I did not have that proper empathy, and now, I can really understand the anger and the fear and what is actually driving parents. (Gemma)

Olivia recognises how motherhood has added depth to her understanding of parents' motivations:

> When (parents/carers) come through that door irate and angry, I get what their primary driver is. If I were not a parent, I would still be able to understand that –but it does add a depth that sometimes helps. (Olivia)

Susan also agrees, describing how her improved appreciation of the parents' perspective has informed her actions to strengthen the connections between the school and parents:

> Being a parent gives you a realism. It is quite good to know what it is like to be a parent of a child who goes through school. It gives you an understanding of the parents' perspective and the things that you can do in the school to improve communication with parents. (Susan)

Most leaders with secondary-aged children appreciate how their parental status is even more valuable in establishing connections with parents. Being a mother of teenagers gives a very personal vantage point from which to talk to parents from a shared parental experience. As Deborah describes, "You get more of an insight when

you are living with teenagers and of their parents as well. I will say, 'Look. Trust me. I had the same problem. Can I make a suggestion? What about trying this?'"

Many leaders are aware that parents' poor school experiences can make them suspicious of educational professionals. Being a parent themselves enables a connection with parents on at least one common level, engendering more trust. Gemma comments on how her parental status changes parents' perceptions of her, "I definitely feel that you are less of a threat. I never realised I was a threat before, but I picked up on that softening of people. Before, people found me threatening."

Ellie explains how she uses her experience of being a parent to break down any potential barriers and establish a connection with the parents. A consequence of her positioning is that parents reach out to her as a parent:

> Parents will often say – you have children. You know how it feels. Because my daughter is in year seven, I refer to her. I pushed the position. I understand how you feel – to build the connection. The parents know me as a person, not just as a headteacher. (Ellie)

Elevated trust helps build parental support in challenging situations when leaders can use their status as parents and understanding to diffuse situations and provide alternative solutions from a place of greater credibility. Enhanced insight into the parents' perspective makes most leaders feel more confident when dealing with challenging parental meetings. As Chloe describes:

> I use my status as a parent often. If I have an irate parent complaining or upset parent, my opening line is usually, "I am a mum too, and I do understand how you are feeling". I find that instantly defuses an awful lot of conversations. I can speak to them with that experience. I have had many phone calls when I have rung someone and said, "Look, I am really worried about your son/daughter. I am ringing you as one mum to another because if this happened to my child, I

would want somebody to let me know. I can be taken more seriously because I have got that experience. You know I do understand. (Chloe).

Strengthening Student Relationships. As with parents and staff, many leaders share that as a mother, they experience a positive shift in their relationships with students. Leaders gain insights as parents, watching their children contend with friendship issues and deliberating over decisions about qualifications and subjects, strengthening relationships with the students in school. Also, sharing stories about their children with students helps them to build connections to establish followership.

Most mothers of secondary-aged children share that parenting teenagers provides an alternative insight into students' struggles, developing their empathy, which improves their effectiveness as a leader. Fran shares how experiences of parenting a teenager informs her leadership more than those she gained from parenting a young child. She explains how going through the GCSE course option process from the perspective of her son gave her new insights into the process:

> I have always had little ones, but now, as I watch my son approach options and talk about them, it is interesting that you learn more about it from the other side. I have been a teacher all my working life, but watching him consider what he wants to do for options, I have never had such a keen sense of the dilemmas before. It does not mean you could not do it if you did not have children, but it makes me a better leader because I can see what it might be like from the other side. (Fran)

Deborah agrees that parenting teenage children improves her understanding of her students' behaviours and her willingness to empathise:

> As a parent, I remember my children getting hungry at half past eleven or twelve o'clock, and suddenly, I realize that when those boys are getting bored and fidgety, it is because they want their lunch! I just never realised things like that before. You get those light bulb moments. It has made me more empathetic as a teacher and leader. (Deborah)

Many leaders also share how parenting bolsters their confidence to reveal a more personal side of their leadership with their students, strengthening their connections with them. Deborah explains how she shares stories about her daughters, enabling her students to relate to her better:

> When I teach my Year 11, I will say, "My daughter was revising …" - they love those little stories…. They will all sit there and look and think, "You are human as well." I think you gain more of an insight into what it is like to be a teenager, I was a teenager myself, but you forget very quickly. You get more of an insight into when you are living with teenagers. (Deborah)

The Influence of Mothering on Personal Leadership Effectiveness

Most leaders share how motherhood improves their personal effectiveness as a leader, which in turn benefits the whole school, thereby opening rather than closing doors to a richer leadership experience. Firstly, many leaders share how mothering improves their time management, providing an impetus to set stricter time boundaries. Secondly, mothering increases many leaders' motivation for work by increasing their determination to ensure their schools meet their own parental expectations.

Improving Time Management. Many leaders share how having children enables them to perform leadership effectively in less time by incentivising better time management. Olivia reports how having children focused her desire to develop strategies to work more efficiently: "Having children has made me use my time more efficiently because you have to. I could not stay at work until eight p.m. because they were at home. I had to be much stricter with how I used my time. Mel agrees, "I always

say to staff - it is amazing how much more efficient I became the second I had children."

A headteacher has the power to organise their own time, which many leaders share, makes setting time boundaries easier. Gemma articulates:

> Combining headship and motherhood is doable, and actually, the higher up you are, the easier it is when you have children because you are more in charge of your own time. You are more in control of your own boundaries and workload. It is actually easier to be a headteacher and a mother than to be any other senior leader. (Gemma)

Finally, many leaders reflect on how staff also respect these boundaries more easily because they relate to the demands of parenting:

> They all know that I have a child and that when I leave, that is where I am going. It is almost more straightforward when you have children because people get where you are going. I have set boundaries. (Gemma)

Susan emphasises the importance of talking about her family commitments to role model a work-life balance, "I am very open about the fact that I have other commitments. So does everybody. It does not make you any worse because you are a mum, and you can juggle it." Mothering requires leaders to set boundaries on their work to have time at home, which creates the conditions to make the headship role more sustainable with motherhood.

Increasing Motivation for Work. The determination to lead their school in a way that meets their parental standards and expectations motivates many leaders to work harder. Leaders explain how thinking about their school in terms of their parental standards provides an additional lens through which to examine their schools and motivate them to be relentless in their determination to achieve as Karen explains:

I want this to be the school I would send my child to, and I never thought in those terms before. I do not think I ever really worked somewhere that I would send my child to. That really drives me as a headteacher - it makes me relentless. Motherhood definitely changed me in that way. (Karen)

Anna also shares how thinking about her children is crucial in defining the expectations in her school: "If this school is not good enough for my children, it is not good enough for anybody's children."

Mothering: Experiences of Prejudice

Leaders do not perceive mothering diminishes their leadership effectiveness; however, most headteachers and executive headteachers reflect upon the prejudice they experience in their current role relating to their gender and motherhood. For many leaders who have experienced prejudice as working mothers, the judgements, mainly from men governors, senior leaders, and parents, are directed towards their performance. Their commitment to work and ability to be effective leaders is questioned. Susan articulates, "I remember people saying I did not know you were a parent. I do think people see you differently as a parent. They think I cannot be a parent because I do my job properly." Chloe echoes Susan:

When I had my first child, a deputy headteacher was very much of the opinion that you either had a career or children. I used to work in the school much later until I had children and then adjusted my hours, and I always got the impression that she thought that meant that I could not do my job as well. (Chloe)

One leader describes how her motherhood status and diminutive stature confounds some parents. Although she has not received explicit, sexist comments, she detects underlying prejudice in their comments criticising school leadership.

I do think the parent body and others probably still are a little bit confused by the fact that I am a young mum, short, as well as having my role. I do not think I fit the stereotype of what you would expect from an executive headteacher. I have had a couple of, and I would not say, out-and-out sexist things said to me because people are cleverer than that, but a couple of parents have made odd comments about standards at the school slipping, and senior leaders need to have a little bit more gravitas.

Many leaders describe how their leadership can be judged negatively using a highly gendered lens. Anna explains that as a women leader, some staff perceive her to be weak; however, when she acts in a commanding way, she can be criticised for acting against gendered expectations:

Women are considered to be weak, and there are a lot of people thinking that they can ride roughshod over them. There are some challenges that women face. And there are also the stereotypes - I got accused of being a ballbreaker once because I told somebody that what they were doing was not right. You move from being a weak, kind person, a walkover, to a ballbreaker. And probably men who give the same messages are listened to more. (Anna)

Lisa shares how gendered expectations of leadership often mean that she can present her leadership unfaithfully to her own values:

Fitting onto the senior team, you realise the people you have to impress are often men of a certain age who have a particular view that is not necessarily based in education of what a leader/ CEO looks like or would project. I have spoken about my emotional intelligence, understanding myself and bringing the best out of people, but if you talk about that too much, those people think you do not have much spine. What I learned is that I needed to project more of that steeliness, which is there as well, which is not the side I would necessarily empathise with and bring to the forefront to impress those types of people. (Lisa)

Many leaders describe how governors treat them differently than men headteachers. Generally, these governors are men of a certain age whose views on women are very traditional. Susan articulates, "Male governors have perhaps treated me differently because I am a female and a mother, but that is a sexist societal thing." Jill agrees,

recounting how "a previous governor just thought I should be in the kitchen making the tea and putting the cakes on a plate."

Leaders have also experienced gendered comments directed towards the weakness of their gender intended to undermine their status. Olivia articulates, "I will get those misogynistic male parents who assume simply by being female I must be a piece of fluff who cannot do the job, and those comments will be around appearance." Sharon also recounts a specifically diminishing comment from a senior colleague referring to her appearance: "He was very dismissive of me as a female, and he would say things in meetings like, 'You are not just a pretty face then, are you?'"

More commonly, leaders discuss how rather than feeling discriminated against, they feel exposed by being the only women in the room. Fran explains, "There are six headteachers, and I am the only female one of them. Marginalised is too strong a word for it, but it certainly does not feel like you are necessarily on an equal footing." Jane agrees with Fran:

> I look around and see our networks or headteacher meetings and feel a bit out of place. I do not fit the mould. And that affects some people's perceptions of me, my decision making, and how I choose to do things. (Jane)

In overcoming the influence of prejudice on self-esteem and identity, leaders stress the importance of support from other women, as Jill explains:

> I have met friends along the way, like Dr. Karen Edge. I have encountered sexism and have been treated not very well at times. Being able to talk to somebody who is not connected to your own organisation sometimes can help. (Jill)

Jane agrees and highlights the role of networks like #WomensEd set up to support and encourage women into educational leadership: "Networks like Women Ed have been important in changing some of those expectations."

Leadership: Opportunities and Challenges for Mothering

All leaders share how mothering enriches rather than presents challenges for their leadership. In contrast, leaders recognise that headship presents opportunities and challenges for mothering. The opportunities include providing positive role modelling for their children and the financial benefits. The challenges include the high levels of accountability and responsibility incumbent on the head and executive headteacher, which can take leaders physically and emotionally away from their families and the incurred guilt from not always being there for their children.

Being a Positive Role Model to Their Children

Most leaders identify how being a leader offers a positive role model to their children, reinforcing that women can lead and men can parent, which is important to their children's future careers and happiness and advancing gender equality. Ellie articulates the importance of being a strong role model for her sons to challenge traditional stereotypes of women: "It is beneficial for my son and daughter that they see women in leadership; that is very helpful." Susan agrees, "I have been a good role model to my children, particularly the boys, in terms that women are independent people."

Leaders with daughters are especially driven to be positive role models. As Chloe articulates, "I feel quite strongly about being a role model to my girls, that it is perfectly

normal for me to go out to work and being the one getting promoted and for dad to be at home with them." Fran agrees with the importance of empowering her daughters through her example, "I am showing my daughter that you can lead. That is probably quite important. She is quite feisty. I can imagine her going on and doing great things." Jill underlines the importance of role modelling by describing how her success inspires her daughter:

> I said to her, "What do you aspire to be?" She answered, "Well, I am not sure yet. But if I am as successful as you are, I will have a tomorrow." You do have an impact on your children, and it is good for them to see their parents working. (Jill)

For leaders such as Deborah, role modelling for her daughters, how to balance leadership and home life is equally important:

> I am conscious as the mother of two girls. I am a role model for them. It is important for me to try to get that balance right. I tell them, "It is important to be ambitious, it is important to follow your dreams, and you can achieve what you want to, as long as you work hard, treat people properly, and be kind. But at the same time, you need proper time with each other. (Deborah)

Financial Rewards

Most leaders speak about the financial benefits of a headteacher's or executive headteacher's salary. As the family's breadwinners, their salaries are important to the family income and enable them to afford a comfortable lifestyle and provide opportunities, such as travel for their children. These financial benefits go some way to alleviate the guilt leaders can feel for working full-time away from home. Deborah articulates, "We have a nice life and a nice lifestyle, and we can go on nice holidays and all those things. In this way, the salary can go some way to mitigating the mother guilt." For Jill, financially, giving her children a comfortable life goes towards removing

any guilt: "What's the point of feeling guilty? There is no time. You provide well for your family. You have a good life."

Finally, for those who are lone parenting, such as Anna, the salary is crucial in enabling their independence and providing for their children:

> I suppose in the early years, promotion was about being able to afford things for the children rather than improving things for me. I was in a different position because it was just me, and therefore, I did not think about stepping down because I could not. (Anna)

For a few leaders in relationships, their salary is important in enabling their independence, as reflected in Susan's statement:

I am pleased that I am not dependent on anybody else – my life is my own – I do not have to make decisions on the basis that I have no money. I like that and do not think I could live without that now. (Susan)

High Levels of Accountability and Responsibility

Most leaders point to school accountability as one of the main drivers of stress and discuss how working within the current educational context in England requires headteachers to be courageous leaders. Jane articulates, **"**League tables have created an accountability culture we work in as headteachers. You have got to be kind of brave, doing the right thing and not feeling so overwhelmed." The culture of accountability in schools increases the level of responsibility that weighs on the headteachers' decisions.

The weight of responsibility that school leaders shoulder is the principal challenge of headship for most headteachers. Karen explains how the level of responsibility challenges her self-assurance and is isolating. Ultimately, as headteacher, she feels she is there to make the final decisions:

> Headship challenges your confidence, resilience, and self-belief (more than you ever thought because it is lonely at times). Despite having a fabulous team, you are paid to make that decision in the end. You have to take it away from the team once you have consulted because it is your decision, and that is what you are there to do. They look to you to make the decision. (Karen)

The lack of exposure to high levels of responsibility as a deputy headteacher exacerbates the challenge of dealing with the responsibilities of a headteacher for most leaders. Deborah expresses how being a deputy did not fully prepare her to be a headteacher:

> The burden of responsibility on my shoulders is a lot, and that has been one of the biggest challenges. I am doing things I would never have done as a deputy, not just tasks like exclusions and working with parents. It is just that sense of, "Gosh. I can see that this might go wrong. I have now got to prepare this, and look at this, and let us make sure …" and some of that I would do as a deputy – but not all of it. (Deborah)

Jane also reinforces Deborah's reflections on the difference between the role of deputy headteacher and headteacher:

> Being a headteacher means that you are ultimately accountable and responsible. That can feel like a huge burden when you have significant issues to resolve, whether balancing the budget or considering a staff dismissal. Ultimately, those kinds of things are on your shoulders, and you are making them. Those can be the things that keep you awake at night as a headteacher, whereas if you are an assistant or a deputy, you do the best you can, but you can pass it up the chain. (Jane)

Assuming ultimate responsibility for the school and its community, most leaders share is the difference between being the deputy and the headteacher. Lisa agrees with

Jane, "The big difference of being a headteacher is there is nowhere to dump it – people come to me, but me transferring any of my worries down to deputies or anyone else is inappropriate." Most leaders agree that assuming high levels of responsibility takes an emotional toll, as Mel articulates:

> It is an awesome responsibility in all senses of the word. It is challenging to take on a responsibility like this and not feel the toll of it at times, whether that is a particular student who does not get the grade they need, the exclusion that you have to do, or the family we cannot help, or the difficult decisions you need to make because of funding -these are things that are tough. (Mel)

Leaders' determination to lead with deep regard for staff well-being increases the burden of school accountability. Olivia articulates:

> The challenges – if you choose to run your school for the benefit of your students and staff, you carry a significant weight of responsibility yourself. We do not talk about Ofsted or any of the external pressures. The staff write and say lovely things about how relaxing and pleasurable it is to work here and what a collaborative team effort it is. I have sleepless nights in August before results day – I carry that pressure. I view that as part of the job. (Olivia)

Many leaders share the level of responsibility incumbent on the English headteachers means the role becomes all-consuming and negatively influences family life. The constancy of the work takes them physically and mentally away from their children. Jane, even when not at school, describes how she still finds herself thinking about her work:

> Being an executive headteacher impacts family life, and being mentally present when you have a position of responsibility can be quite hard; even when you are physically at home with your family, it can be difficult to switch off and not have your thinking processes plagued by problems. (Jane)

Fran echoes Jane, explaining how she can find switching off from work when at home challenging:

And that sense of carrying the load affects your personal life because you are trying to work out the box you can put it in, in your head. Then you are trying to work out if you can shut the lid of that box, but that is quite difficult. (Fran)

The challenge of switching off when at home can cause tension between leaders and their partners, Karen articulates:

If you asked my husband, he would say that sometimes I am a headteacher before I am a mother, and he finds that difficult because I am a headteacher 24/7 really and whilst I am a mother 24/7. (Karen)

Feelings of Guilt. The constancy of the work contributes to leaders feeling guilty. Jill articulates, "The thing that used to make me feel most guilty was the constant work being on every minute." The constancy of the work takes leaders away from their children. Guilt is often felt more keenly when children are younger, as Lisa articulates:

When they are little, perhaps, they do not always understand that as much. That is hard, putting extra pressure on you as a mum. I was always convinced that the mums who did not work were saying look at her turning up at the last minute looking flustered again. (Lisa)

Isabel agrees her preschool son does not understand yet why she is not always there, which increases her feelings of guilt:

Every so often, my son says I do not want you to go to work. I miss you listening to me, mummy and that makes me feel guilty, especially when I am doing an email at half past eight, and I should be giving him my attention while he puts his pyjamas on. There are things like that that I have to wrestle with the duality of the roles. (Isabel)

Although most leaders recognise a sense of guilt, they have developed strategies that minimise its intrusion into family life or impact on their well-being, as Karen articulates:

You always have that mother guilt, and I was talking with a colleague the other day who is due back the last week in July, and I said, "You always have mother guilt. It is just how you manage it. And some days you manage it better than others". (Karen)

Similarly, Ellie says, "You can be a good parent and a good leader, as well as having the guilt, but every parent has that." A few leaders reach a point where they no longer feel guilty. Jill explains, "I let the guilt go a long time ago because I just think it is unhealthy, and nobody has the right to tell you what to do."

A few leaders describe how their leadership negatively impacts the quality of interactions with their children and partners. Jane articulates, "I have at home that vicious spiral of feeling guilty for not giving as much as myself as a mum, which you can get into a bit of a negative leap about." Susan similarly articulates how her mood can affect her family interactions: "Sometimes I feel guilty, I go home, and I am in a vile mood, and they cannot possibly understand."

Only a few leaders articulate guilt over missing events as a problem. Control over their diaries allows headteachers more flexibility than when they were senior leaders. However, Isabel, whose husband is also a school leader, recognises that even having control over her diary, she has to make compromises during term time:

It does mean term time they have to make a lot of sacrifices in terms of time. They (the children) have to accept we are never going to go on school trips with them, or we probably are not going to go to one of their class assemblies as we have to prioritise what we go to. (Isabel)

Jill articulates that the guilt caused by missing out on events can be managed by compensating for the event missed with another: "You cannot help but feel guilty. And

things that you might miss out on as well. There are times you have to suck it up and hope that you get to see something else."

Reflections on Navigating Motherhood and Leadership

Most leaders discuss how motherhood and leadership enrich each other. Headteachers and executive headteachers participating are strongly motivated by the rewards of leadership, which compensate for the pressure of responsibility that can emotionally and physically take them away from their families, resulting in guilt. They are driven to implement a vision for their schools that accelerates their students' social mobility and establishes a family-friendly school culture where leadership minimises conflicts between staff working and their family lives. Mothering energises and informs their perspective on leadership by increasing their insights into establishing a family-friendly staff culture based on their own experiences of managing their families and careers.

Additional insights that headteachers have gained through becoming a mother improve their empathy with staff and inform their strategic decisions and planning about accommodating family commitments and flexible working. Crucially, becoming a mother has heightened their awareness of the importance of a healthy work-life balance. Their improved appreciation means that at the heart of their vision for sustaining a family-friendly school is establishing structures and systems that allow their staff to establish sustainable working patterns. Role modelling, especially to women, that leading a school and being a mother is possible is a critical facet of implementing their vision for a family-friendly school.

Finally, leaders, drawing on their mothering experience, relate and build closer connexions with parents to strengthen the community their school serves. Aware of the tension that can exist between parents and schools, leaders draw upon their own experiences to develop a more human face to their leadership and break down potential barriers. Developing the trust of their school community is essential aspect of their leadership to promote social mobility.

Top leadership positions present challenges to mothering; however, leaders highly value how being a headteacher has empowered their children by establishing progressive gender role models at home. Finally, financial security enables leaders to provide opportunities for their children and family to enjoy, which may otherwise not have been possible.

Chapter 6: Findings - Perceptions and Management of Work-life balance

The chapter presents the analysis of the findings on leaders' perceptions and experiences of managing their work-life balance. The chapter is organised around the three key areas, which include: 1) perceptions of a sustainable work-life balance, 2) challenges to achieving a sustainable balance, 3) professional and personal support leaders draw upon to achieve balance, 4) rules and strategies women employ to maximise their time. Finally, the chapter pulls together patterns that reflect leaders' perceptions and management of their work-life balance.

Work-life Balance: Perceptions of a Sustainable Balance

Work-life balance is a subjective concept important to most leaders, who perceive they achieve a sustainable balance. The importance of their families is emphasised in their definitions of work-life balance. Fran articulates that a sustainable balance requires investing time and energy in her family: "Being able to do things with my own children." Jane concurs, "I guess feeling that you can properly invest in that family time and have that quality time when you are at home." Chloe highlights the importance of family for her work-life balance when she describes her discontent with being at work late: "Where I have been at work late, that bothers me because I feel like I have missed out on time with my children." Chloe frames the reasons for returning home early in terms of her children: "There are some days where I say, 'I am going to come home early', and my children are not there anyway, or they have disappeared into their rooms".

Most leaders recognise the dynamic nature of their work-life balance, suggesting that the word 'balance' may not be the most accurate word to define or measure the relationship between their work and family lives. Often, work takes up a disproportionate amount of their energy and time, whereas family life takes priority at other times. Jill explains:

> At some points in the week, my life is all focused on work because it has to be, but then there are other times when it is all focused on home because that's the right thing to do. I suppose that is how I would perceive my work-life balance (Jill).

Due to the changing demands of work, leaders recognise that definitions of work-life balance need to consider short- and long-term perspectives. Jane articulates:

> Depending on how crazy work is and how much there is to do, sometimes I feel like I am winning at life, and other times, it can feel like it is entirely out of kilter. My work-life balance can change. On a weekly basis, really. (Jane)

Many leaders reject the separation between work and life implied in the term of work-life balance because of their passion for their work. Anna explains: "I have always been lucky that teaching, and then leadership, for me, has been a hobby and a job in lots of ways. I love thinking about it, reading about it – all those things." Jill agrees:

> I do not talk about work-life balance because my life is my life, and it is made up of various things, and it is about fitting it all in. My work is a big part of that; it always has been and always will be. (Jill)

Factors Influencing Positive Perceptions

The significant patterns explaining leaders' positive perceptions of their work-life balance include the satisfaction leaders derive from their leadership roles and the integral part of professional life to their identity.

Importance of Job Satisfaction. A source of most leaders' satisfaction with their work-life balance is the joy they gain from their work. As mentioned in the above section, many leaders' perceptions and definitions of work-life balance reject the separation often understood in the term because of their enthusiasm for and the high value they place on teaching/leading. The rewards that most leaders enjoy from their role compensate, especially for busy and challenging times at work. Lisa articulates:

> A work-life balance is enormously important without question or doubt. You are talking to someone full of gratitude at the moment. I have not been happier professionally in a long time for various reasons. I cannot believe how much I like the school I am in and that I have connected with. I can have a hell of a week and have those moments, but when you are happy, you accept that. (Lisa)

Jill echoes, sharing how her happiness in the job offsets the challenges she can face and motivates her to balance headship and her family life:

> The girls are precious. But I choose to do a job that I enjoy, which eases dealing with all the day-to-day frustrations you get. If I can summarise the impact that I can have, it is phenomenal, and I feel privileged to have the job that I do. (Jill)

Most participating leaders are ambitious and highly motivated by work, which drives leaders to find ways to work and carry out family responsibilities.

Importance of Leadership to Identity. The affirmation and rewards work brings for leaders' self-worth and identity influence many leaders' perception of their work-life balance. Leaders like Anna view work as a crucial part of their identity: "Work is part of who you are and your identity." Jill agrees that teaching and leadership are

integral to her life: "My work is a big part of who I am and always has been and always will be." A leader whose children are under seven agrees on the importance of her leadership role, as much as her role as a mother, in sustaining her well-being:

> I like my work. I work hard. I find it very gratifying. Although I enjoyed my last few weeks of maternity, being able to take the children to and from school, I know if that were my normal, it would drive me bonkers.

Work-life Balance: Challenges to Achieving a Sustainable Balance

The two significant patterns that explain the challenges headteachers experience in achieving a sustainable balance are the workload and pressures of leading a school-graded Inadequate or Requires Improvement (RI) and the first year of headship and investing more time and energy in their own leisure time.

Work-life Balance of Headteachers in Schools graded RI or Inadequate

Most headteachers share that the demands of leading a school in the category of RI or inadequate are intensified. The pressure to rapidly improve the school significantly increases the workload and can make the role all-consuming. Anna articulates that when her school was graded Inadequate, she struggled to switch off from work:

> The school was in such a state, and my life was all about trying to improve everything. All my emails came in on my phone. I ended up picking things up at all hours. I ran the school's Twitter account and all the priorities –I never switched off. (Anna)

Additional demands on leaders' time undermine attempts to balance work and family. Mel reflects upon when her school was Inadequate:

My work-life balance this year is significantly better than two years ago because the school was graded Inadequate. There is that time in a school's improvement journey when you have to be on-site for long hours to get the work done. (Mel)

Isabel's school is in RI, agrees, describing the long hours she feels she needs to work:

Last night, I left at quarter to eight pm; that probably happens two nights a week, that is just what happens. I would rather it was not that way, but I cannot see how I would get through my workload if I did not do that. (Isabel)

Finally, the culture in schools graded Inadequate or RI can often be negative. Fran explains how rebuilding trust with stakeholders, an essential step to improving any school makes headship in these schools incredibly emotionally demanding:

It was a really, really difficult time, the beginning particularly, and there were lots and lots of cross people – everywhere. Cross parents, cross children, cross Governors, cross everybody and mistrusting of anything. There was a lot of rebuilding to do. (Fran)

Work-life Balance in the First Year of Headship

Headteachers in their first year share how they find the role all-consuming, pushing them to work long hours and distracting them from their family lives. They articulate that deputy headship did not adequately prepare them for assuming the level of responsibility of headship, which negatively impacts their work-life balance. Gemma describes how the cognitive overload diverts her physically and mentally from her family life, and the intensity of the role often leaves her emotionally drained:

The challenge is the relentlessness of the role. I find the emotional side quite draining, so when I get home at night, I do not have any emotion left. I have used it all up in the day (laughs). I always feel guilty that I am not engaging enough with my boy. (Gemma)

Deborah similarly reflects on the relentlessness of the role, again describing long working hours during the evenings and weekends:

> I would like to do less in the evenings, but it is not always possible because I have looming deadlines. Not working in the evenings would be better and I would like not to work at weekends. In my role, it is not realistic to expect that. You have that moral obligation to students. You feel you must push yourself. I try to have weekends where I say to myself, "Look, I just cannot do anything, and that is it. (Deborah)

Finally, Ellie expresses how the mental load and the long hours disturb her family time:

> In terms of my family life, I know that I do not think I am balancing it well. A lot of women do not balance this well. I have been doing very long days. I am not very good at turning my laptop off or my phone in the evening, and the children complain about that. I would like to be a little better at not looking at emails. I worry I may miss something. (Ellie)

Even when these leaders are at home and not working, they often feel not fully present as they continue to think about work. Ellie shares, "I am conscious that I need to try harder to be present in the moment, but it is hard." Gemma agrees:

> I have a WhatsApp group with my senior team, which I will be on in the evenings a lot, which is working – I do not class it as working – but it is working because I am not fully present in my house then. (Gemma)

In their second or third year, many headteachers reflect on the challenges of maintaining a healthy balance in the first year of headship. Sharon explains the negative impact of long working hours on her family life:

> By term two, I just thought, "My God. I cannot do this. This is ridiculous. I am breaking my family. My daughter was in year 11 and doing her mock exams and was not doing any work. I was getting emails from school constantly about her getting behaviour points for chatting. When I spoke to her, she just screamed at me, "It is because you are never here." (Sharon)

Fran agrees with Sharon on the difficulties of establishing a healthy work-life balance in her first year of headship:

> That first year of headship was tough, and nobody can quite explain that to you because all I did was work all the time. And even when I was not working, I was thinking about working, which is still true to an extent, but I have got better at compartmentalising work. (Fran)

Prioritising Personal Time

When defining work-life balance, leaders rarely mention prioritising leisure time for themselves. However, most leaders agree that this aspect of a work-life balance is the most challenging part to achieve. Isabel shares how time for herself is the aspect of her persona and weekly plan that tends to slip:

> There is quite a lot of information in that plan. I broadly stick to it because some of them are tied to the things the children need to do. I do not adhere to the things that are to do with making time for me.

Fran agrees, describing how she struggles to make time for herself:

> The things that get lost are the things for yourself, are they not? That is the issue because you can do your work and you can do the children, but finding time to go for a run or do the other things for me, I cannot. I am trying desperately to fit them in. I found it helped to do those things as well. It is doing something for yourself, say watching television. I have not done any of those things, no television, but I guess that will pass. (Fran)

Headteachers with preschool children, who are responsible for most of the parenting, find prioritising time for themselves especially challenging, as Gemma articulates:

> My son does not go to bed until eight-thirty or nine in the evening, so there is never any time when I am on my own or I do anything on my own. I do not

watch television or get to read. I could do with trying to carve out some time. This is really hard because I have got him a lot on my own. (Gemma)

However, most leaders value time on their own to switch off. Chloe describes how she purposely sets time aside on weekends: "I have blocks of time there that I keep free to try to make sure that I have some time where I switch off." Sharon talks about the necessity of being firm with herself as a strategy to ensure she makes the time:

> I do yoga, and it is lovely. I had stopped, but I started again in the last couple of weeks; that has been the result of me giving myself a bit of a talking to going, "That is not being selfish. You can fit more than one hour in the whole week for yourself." I do kettles, and then I do yoga. I do walk the dog. (Sharon)

Work-life balance: Professional and Personal Support

The findings on professional support, including the professional relationships and networks leaders draw upon to work more efficiently, are presented. Significantly, leaders highlight the importance of an aligned senior team in school and the importance of trusted networks outside of work to help them manage the complexity of headship. Following on from these findings are those on personal support, practical and emotional, leaders depend upon at home, which foreground the role of their partners in sharing parental and domestic responsibilities.

Professional Support

When leaders discuss the relative importance of professional support they draw upon, two significant patterns emerge, highlighting the importance of developing a trusted senior team and the support of external local professionals and networks. Less-

mentioned but significant patterns underline the value of help from an executive or co-headteacher, national organisations, including those on social media and leadership coaching.

Trusted Senior Team. Most headteachers stress the importance of establishing a trusted and aligned team to significantly minimise work-related stress. Specifically, leaders emphasise the value of the senior team to drive forward their vision for the school, making a work-life balance beyond the school manageable. Deborah describes the importance of her senior team:

> My senior team are aware that we are all working towards the same vision. We have all got the same values. That kind of support has been essential on a close collegial level. Having people you can trust, I suppose, is what I am saying. We are on the same wavelength and share the same vision. (Deborah)

Fran agrees, "In school, my first priority was trying to establish a team around me, who are with me, and can see what I wanted to do". Ellie, drawing on previous experience, highlights how working within a senior team who are unsupportive of the headteacher's vision increases stress and workload:

> Support from your senior team is very important, and being in a team where there has been conflict between the headteacher and the senior team is toxic, and you cannot move forward. (Ellie)

A few leaders discuss the supportive role deputy headteachers can play beyond implementing the school's vision. Isabel describes how dependable deputy headteachers helped her to deal with domestic demands when her husband was ill: "I was fortunate that I had good deputies, who quickly stepped up and said, we have got it and take the time that you need." Chloe highlights how she draws on her deputy headteachers' support not only to work hard, minimising her workload, but also to take

care of her well-being: "A strong leadership team has been essential, there are two deputy heads, who are great and who work really hard and look out for me."

Support of Local External Networks. Most leaders highlight the importance of supportive local professionals and networks to explore issues best not discussed with their own senior team and learn more time-effective ways of working. For leaders working within a Trust, an already inbuilt network of leaders exists, whereas those leaders working in local authority schools access a range of formal and informal networks. Specifically, many leaders identify the importance of local headteacher networks or headteachers within the academy chain or Trust to provide confidential guidance and serve as a sounding board for issues, as Isabel articulates:

> I have forged an alliance with a local executive headteacher. He is a mentor, but he has made an informal commitment to support my school, which I find very valuable because I know I can say things to him that I could not say to my team. (Isabel)

Formal mechanisms establish links between headteachers in some local authorities where participating leaders work. Chloe articulates how being paired up with a local women headteacher has helped her overcome her apprehension about being a women headteacher: "I was conscious about being a female headteacher, particularly in a secondary school. A buddying system operates in Lancashire, which I have used. I particularly asked to be buddied up with another women headteacher."

For participating headteachers working within academy chains, there are important inbuilt and accessible support networks. Fran explains:

> We are a national academy chain with six schools across the whole country. One of the headteachers, who I travel to meetings with, we have got to know each other quite well, and they have become an informal mentor. (Fran)

Mel reiterates:

> We are a close group of secondary headteachers I work with in the Trust, and they have become my friends. They have influenced my thinking and have greatly supported me, especially as an early headteacher. I could just call on people. They have been my network of support. (Mel)

Many leaders particularly value the support of other women headteachers because they feel there already exists an immediate acceptance and empathy, which is particularly supportive. Anna articulates, "I have always had a group of almost exclusively women who have been a part of a supportive network at and outside work." Mel agrees, "I have had important influences from female leaders who have influenced my thinking, which has helped to support my leadership development." Deborah goes further and describes how female support is always preferable for her: "I would always ask for a female coach, whether out of fear, it is just the way it has worked out. It is just what I would prefer. That, for me, is the key."

Support of an Executive/Co Headteacher. Headteachers working alongside a CEO, executive principal or co-headteacher appreciate the importance of those relationships in sharing the responsibility of headship and providing advice. Ellie articulates: "At work, you need support from the people above you. In my case, that is the CEO, who I get on very well with. I talk to her about ideas." Working with a co-headteacher, Deborah acknowledges, is especially helpful in establishing sustainable working patterns: "My "co" in our co-headship is very supportive, kind and understanding about our life-work balance. Working with a co-headteacher is something that makes a difference."

Support of National Organisations. The leaders do not mention trade unions as sources of support. A few leaders mention two national networks: The Schools, Students and Teachers Network (SSAT), the largest national network of schools in the UK, and the Key, the largest national network specifically for school leaders. Both networks are membership organisations and require the schools to pay a subscription for membership. The leaders who use the SSAT and the Key utilise the networks to access information and remain informed on the national education picture. Susan explains that the SSAT is a valuable way of keeping up to date: "We have been a member of the SSAT that is great for knowing what is going on nationally, but I cannot afford it." Olivia also acknowledges the SSAT as facilitating valuable connections:

> I am fortunate that my links with the SSAT have enabled me to work with people nationally. It also led me to meet with different people. I sit on the committee of the Leading Edge steering group. (Olivia)

Building Connections on Social Media. A Few leaders mention networking on Twitter and Women's Ed. Leaders recognise how Twitter can help to establish broader connections beyond the locality where the leaders work. However, the pattern that emerges is although social media is beneficial, face-to-face networking is more valuable. Lisa expresses how she has used the #Women's Ed network and Twitter to expand her network: "I have also reached out on social media. I have been part of #Women's Ed and went to an unconference in 2016. I am connected to various people on Twitter."

A few leaders express reservations about using social media and the negative feedback a leader can receive. Chloe is cautious about networking on Twitter due to her gender: "There are plenty of educators on Twitter using social media networks like

#WomenEd, but it is different being on social media as a woman." Networking on social media becomes more significant when social media facilitates a face-to-face relationship. Jane describes how a connection she made through Twitter became her leadership coach: "Someone I have known already through Twitter, and the relationship spun off that. She has been instrumental in helping me develop as a leader and providing almost therapy every half term. The sessions with her have been really important."

Leadership coaching. A few leaders share how leadership coaching has been supportive in helping them to sustain a healthy work-life balance. The leaders regard coaches as valued confidential colleagues and reciprocal thinking partners who support them in assessing situations through different lenses. Anna articulates how an assigned leadership coach is a beneficial thinking partner in helping her effectively manage her workload:

> I have not formally had mentors until I worked with somebody as my mentor and coach in my last headship. And that was fantastic. Coaching can make such a massive difference in getting everything in perspective of what you can and cannot do. (Anna)

Coaching develops the confidence of the leader in thinking and problem-solving, as Jane expresses:

> The value of leadership coaching is to be able to talk through significant decisions or problems. You feel more confident in the ultimate decision, and even though there is never a right and wrong decision, you know there are just better or worse ones. (Jane)

Similarly, Deborah finds coaching empowering, which helps her to navigate more effectively the decisions she needs to make and minimising any related stress:

> I do have a coach. I had a coach intermittently during my career, and I have got one that the school arranged who is brilliant and good at helping me see things very clearly. It has been the most important thing, giving me the space with someone very skilled at what they do to reflect and think through problems. I feel empowered after an excellent coaching session. (Deborah)

Support in the Home

Leaders emphasise the division of parenting and domestic responsibilities as a central task in establishing a work-life balance. Therefore, most leaders highly value emotional and practical support from their partners in the home. Four significant patterns emerge explaining how day-to-day routines of home life are managed to help leaders sustain a work-life balance, including 1) the importance of communication in negotiating familial roles, 2) sharing of parental responsibilities, 3) the availability of high-quality childcare and 4) division of domestic duties such as cleaning and cooking. Family and friend support with childcare and sharing the cognitive labour of family life are mentioned but not significant factors in enabling leaders to achieve work-life balance.

Negotiating Familial Roles*. Leaders share how they and their partners negotiate familial roles and make important decisions, including how much time they and their partner spend on essential parenting duties and how to raise their family together. Most leaders highlight the importance of communication to 1) negotiate the employment status of their partner and familial roles, 2) ensure an equitable division of labour, c) deepen understanding of each other 3) enable consistent child-rearing. Jill explains how they reconfigured the familial roles together, including his employment status: "After the birth of our twins, my husband and I talked a lot and

decided for one of us to stay at home. I was more ambitious than he was, so we decided he would go part-time." Jane also explains how, after much discussion, she and her husband decided for him to be the principal carer, which has been influential in shaping her leadership:

> He has done a couple of part-time jobs, but he is essentially the main carer at home; those choices in our family have definitely influenced and affected the kind of headteacher I can be. (Jane)

Olivia articulates how communication is essential in contributing to a fairer division of labour in the home:

> Good communication and organisation are important in sharing parental responsibilities – we have a whiteboard on the fridge to map out what we do and our commitments for the week and the weekend. We divide what we do and constantly try to talk about it, keeping it balanced and fair. (Olivia)

Lisa stresses the importance of keeping the discussion open to enable her family to understand and support each other better:

> We talk so we understand that our lives, the ebbs and flow – next week is going to be one hell of a rush; we buckle up, and then it is only a couple of weeks until the holiday. The fact we talk about it and say things like here we go – keeping lines of communication open is important in helping us work together. (Lisa)

As Deborah underlines, communication is important in sharing child-rearing more effectively:

> Sometimes, we try different strategies with our daughter. What is good is we always discuss everything together. I will say, "I have tried this". You can try this" now. It is done through discussion. Sometimes, his parenting might be too heavy, and I will say, "We should do this instead." It is mainly done through discussion.

Sharing Parental Responsibilities. Most leaders describe their partners as engaged parents and foreground how important sharing the day-to-day logistics of parenting is in sustaining a healthy work-life balance. Jane articulates, "I think having a real partner at home is key." She describes how, without her partner resisting the "traditional gender role" and supporting her at home with the children, she would "struggle meeting the responsibility that comes with being a leader." Leaders stress the importance of sharing parental responsibilities such as running children to and from nursery/school and after-school activities, preparing meals, and carrying out the bedtime routine.

Their work outside the home influences the extent to which leaders' partners carry out parental responsibilities. Eight leaders' partners work part-time or are at home full-time, carrying out a large share of the parenting. These leaders highly value their partners' support in helping them achieve a healthy work-life balance. As one headteacher articulates:

> My partner is a woman. I have been very fortunate and atypical of a female headteacher in that I have had a partner who has taken the lion's share of the home duties. My life is desperately facilitated by having a housewife. That is just the bottom line of it. My working life has been facilitated by that.

Leaders appreciate the time created by having an engaged parent at home:

> The difference my husband working part-time has meant is that I can get up and leave at quarter to seven every morning and leave at whatever time, sometimes earlier and sometimes later – it is a wonder to me! (Lisa)

Jane outlines the parental duties her partner carries out to illustrate the time she gains:

He will get them ready in the mornings, take them to school, pick them up from school, ferry them to activities and things, and cook dinner for them. Then, depending on what time I get home, I might put them to bed and read them a story, or he might do that. (Jane)

Having a partner at home is especially supportive when the time demands of headship clash with those of parenting. Chloe highlights:

Having a husband whose understanding and supportive of my career and being prepared to take on a significant amount of childcare and running the children around while I am working late or at parents' evenings has been massive. (Chloe)

Also, leaders particularly appreciate the reduction in cognitive load by having a partner who can anticipate the needs of parenting and running a home, as Fran articulates:

At home, I am lucky to have another half who is happy to look after the children. He works part-time, and it is hugely supportive. I do not need to worry about the children or home. (Fran)

Jill agrees:

A whole host of pressure was lifted because I did not have to look at my watch for the first time to worry about childcare. I did not have to do any of that because my partner picked our daughter up, which really helped. (Jill)

Finally, Susan describes how her partner, whose parenting she trusts, being at home also reduces her anxiety about not being there:

The support I get at home from my husband is essential. I do not have to worry about the daughter, who is still at home, as he will be there to do things for her. I have not relied on anyone else, so it has just been him. (Susan)

In households where both partners are in full-time paid employment, leaders describe an equal sharing of school runs and transporting children to various clubs as crucial support. Isabel, who has two primary-age children, describes how her husband, who

also works in educational leadership, equally shares the responsibility of running their children to and from school: "We evenly split the pick-up and drop-offs. I do either three morning drops, and my husband does two, or I do three of the evening drops off, and he does two." Ellie articulates how her partner, who works full time, shares the responsibility of being at home when the children arrive home:

> Now they are both at secondary school; they get the bus home, get in at half past four to quarter to four, and let themselves in. I try to be back at five o'clock or five thirty when they are home. On the occasions when I have got training, and I cannot get home, my husband can be in for them. I do not like the thought of them being home alone. If I am late, he will go back and be there. (Ellie)

Many leaders recognise that managing parenting responsibilities alongside leadership becomes easier as the children grow older because parenting becomes less time-intensive. As Sharon articulates, "As she has got older and went to secondary school, we are not involved in dropping off and picking up because she walks the couple of miles to school every day." Also, in families where there are older children, the older children can support by helping care for the younger ones, as one leader articulates:

> My stepchildren are now 23, 21 and 18; as they get older, their presence is very supportive. The children have loved having adult siblings. They are a big asset to our lives now, not that they ever were not. But they were much more labour intensive and as you would expect. Now, they are not very labour intensive; they add support and adult relationships, which is very beneficial to my younger children.

Deborah echoes how her older daughter provides emotional support for her younger sister: "My elder daughter is really good with my younger daughter as well; if we have a crisis, we work as a team."

High-Quality Childcare. A few leaders whose partners work away from home or work very long hours outside the home perform most of the parenting. These leaders' children are also young, so high-quality childcare is essential for them to fulfil their roles of mother and leader; they describe navigating leadership and motherhood as challenging. Karen, who has primary-aged children, a partner who works away from home for most of the week, explains how managing home life can be difficult: "I drop him (husband) off at the train station at seven o'clock am on Monday, and he comes back at some point on a Thursday. No family support, which is hard." However, she does value her partner's contribution as a father: "He is brilliant with the children, so he does a lot on the weekend, and that is what we sort of share together". Gemma, whose husband works late, also devotes more time to parenting, especially in the evenings, picking up her toddler son, feeding him and putting him to bed falls to her. Gemma describes the division of day-to-day parenting: "My husband drops him at nursery most mornings, but I get him, and then I have him every evening, so I have him all evening, every evening."

The employment of a good childminder or nanny is essential to establish a work-life balance. Firstly, the employment of a nanny or childminder provides the leader with the time to work and minimises the stress generated by having to drop off and pick up children at defined times. The quality of the childcare is important to minimise potential guilt. Karen shares how important her nanny is in supporting her with the logistics of parenting:

> Our nanny will sort everything to do with the children. She arrives at half past six in the morning, does breakfast and walks them to school. She finishes at half past nine. They are at school by half past eight, so she has an hour to prepare the evening meal, do the children's washing, and hoover upstairs. She

does a lot of housekeeping. And then she picks them up at three and stays until half past seven. Within that time, there is cooking and a bit of cleaning. (Karen)

Karen elaborates on how important quality childcare is in minimising her guilt and empowering her as a mother and leader:

> Child-care is very important, and we were incredibly lucky to find childcare that worked for us. You cannot underestimate the value of good childcare; it is worth every penny. It enables you to feel good and confident in your role at work and good and competent in your role as a mother. (Karen)

Gemma agrees, stressing how vital a nanny and a nursery place are to help her balance her responsibilities as a mother and a leader. The employment of a nanny or childminder by most leaders is preferable to a nursery because a nanny or childminder removes the stress of dropping off and picking up at certain times. Lisa articulates the anxiety that can be induced by adhering to nursery opening times:

> Right up even to last year, I would drop off my son. It fell to me if we needed to collect the children, and I was the one who would often have to drop things to do that. I would be the one looking at my watch at the end of meetings and saying I cannot stay any longer; I have to be gone. (Lisa)

Leaders whose partners worked in full-time paid employment when their children were preschool age also employed a childminder to minimise the pressure of managing the logistics of parenting. Olivia explains how finding a childminder significantly reduced her stress levels:

> The biggest thing which was a life changer was changing from putting the children into a nursery to having someone come to the home. Just the ability to walk out of the house, the children still in their pyjamas, but someone was going to get them where they needed to, was life-changing. They certainly did not suffer from going to nursery. But for my stress levels, it was significantly more manageable when I could just leave. (Olivia)

Isabel echoes that before the children went to school, a childminder was critical in reducing the pressure on her to manage her work and family:

> We had childminders when the children were younger. We probably would not have gotten through that period without a stable childminder during their early years. That was very important, and we still have contact with her. She was an extended family member, and it was only when both children were fully engrossed in school that we decided to use before and after-school clubs. (Isabel)

Division of Domestic Labour. Most leaders articulate how the division of household labour does not fall into more traditional patterns, where the burden falls onto the women. They positively describe how they divide the labour equally with their partners. Sharing the cleaning and cooking is important to most leaders so they can spend more time with their children, working and for leisure. Isabel articulates, "There is a real dual responsibility caring for them and caring for the home." Lisa agrees, "I am not the woman that has to go home and do the washing and cooking. Equally, he is not doing it on his own we share." Most leaders, such as Deborah, appreciate sharing household labour is important, so they can have the time to work: "In the week, I sometimes get back in time to cook, but not that often, and he is pretty good at saying, 'You get on with your work, and I will do this'".

Even leaders whose partners work means they are away from home for periods of time do not discuss household labour as a point of tension in their relationship. Karen shares how she and her husband have the same expectations of their home's cleanliness and share the cleaning:

> Filling the dishwasher and all those things, we pretty much share. But we do not live in the most immaculate of houses because that is not a priority for us.

It is not dirty, but I am not obsessive about cleanliness, and I refuse to let it bother me because there are other things. (Karen)

Most headteachers describe how their partners contribute to the cleaning, explaining in equal numbers how they either share the cleaning or how their partner does the bulk of the cleaning. Many leaders share that if they do most of the cooking, their partner does most of the cleaning. Isabel articulates, "He does all the clearing up and washing up, and I do the shopping and cooking. Sharon's situation reflects Isabel's: "He is more involved in cleaning the house and things, whereas I still do all the food shopping and cooking."

Most leaders, due to the support of their partners, do not employ a cleaner. As Jane articulates:

I will tend to do certain things like clean the bathroom and hoover. We have not invested in a cleaner. I know lots of headteachers say that is their godsend, but we have not done that. We split it. (Jane)

Fran agrees: "We clean together. We do not have a cleaner."

However, for those leaders whose partner works long hours or are on their own, hiring a cleaner is crucial support in effectively managing the demands of work and family. Ellie shares, "I have a cleaner who I have had for 13 years; she is amazing – no way could I operate without help at home; she is great." Similarly, Lisa discusses how important the appointment of a cleaner is to reduce her stress:

We have a cleaner, which happened when I became a senior manager. My partner said to me that if you are going into senior leadership, let us remove that particular stress from the week, so we have someone who comes in and cleans for a morning a week. (Lisa)

Karen articulates how a cleaner can prevent tension from arising in her relationship with her partner:

> We used to have a cleaner, but my husband is obsessive about money saving and efficiencies, and he decided – plus she was not really good – that we would not have a cleaner. But I am about to pull rank on that one because it pains me to have to argue about who is cleaning the toilet. (Karen)

Family and Friend Support. Most leaders can only rely on their parents or their partner's parents in exceptional circumstances rather than day-to-day support with childcare. In most cases, their families live too far from them to offer any regular support or live part of the year overseas. Jill shares:

> We never lived particularly close to family. My sister is about half an hour away now, but she has two children and a husband who works in London and is a professor, so she does not have much time either. We cope by ourselves. (Jill)

Jane also describes how her parents live in France for part of the year:

> I have family about just over an hour away, and they are supportive, but they also have a place abroad in France. So, we cannot rely on them for babysitting and childcare because of how many months of the year they are not here in the country. We have become self-sufficient because we do not have relatives down the road who can pop around to help out. (Jane)

Karen's family also live too far away to offer any support with childcare: "My nearest family is two hours away, so we are absolutely on it alone." However, despite receiving little help from their families, many leaders share that in extraordinary circumstances, one or both of their parents will come to support them. For example, Isabel articulates how, at critical points in her children's lives or when her husband was seriously ill, her mother came and stayed to help her out with the children:

> My mum and sister live in Wales, so they are not around. Still, they have supported us at key points to help the children settle into secondary school or transition into primary school – she has always been around to do those weeks, and when my husband was ill, she dropped everything to be there. I have a very supportive family; they are just not close. (Isabel)

Most leaders express how they form a self-sufficient unit with their partners, caring and parenting for their children independently from their families.

Employing Support from Friends. A few leaders discuss the support of friends to help with childcare, where friends are identified – they are parents of children they have met through their children's primary school, as Deborah recalls:

> When the girls went to primary, we built two really good networks of friends at the local primary school who were lovely. We all relied on each other and asked for favours, begged and borrowed. (Deborah)

Isabel's experience resonates with Deborah's:

> We have our children's friends' parents; my daughter gets picked up on a Wednesday by a friend's parents. We share with other parents, particularly as they have grown closer relationships at school (primary). We can reciprocate support networks with other parents – maybe they do a bit more than us (laugh)– those things benefit us. (Isabel)

Sharing the Cognitive Labour of Family Life. Cognitive labour involves anticipating household needs, identifying how to fulfil them and monitoring the results. The few leaders who refer to the division of cognitive labour describe an unequal division, as Gemma articulates, "I probably do all the thinking if that makes sense (laughs). I do all the planning; I sort of drive our lives forward. I will do the shopping, buy everything we need, and organise things." Katie also positions herself as the one making household decisions and plans, as she articulates:

> I am also the galvanizer, sorting and clearing. This holiday, I said, "Right, there are too many papers everywhere. Let us have a real purge on shredding documents. Let us tidy up this room. Let us go out and buy what we need to redo this. I am the galvanizer – otherwise, the house would stay the same. (Katie)

Leaders present a couple of reasons why cognitive labour falls to them. Firstly, the leaders, such as Isabel, recognise their reluctance to relinquish control of certain areas:

> We try to have division around not just the practical labour but the thinking load; for example, who pays the cleaner, it is very bourgeoise, who pays the childminder. My husband sorts out all the payments and organisation of football. I do the same for ballet/ dance, which is all traditionally divided – we still have this division over which responsibilities we take on. However, I do more around communications with other parents about play dates and organising birthdays and Christmas. I have relinquished the things I feel comfortable with – there are things I quite like holding on to. (Isabel)

Secondly, leaders perceive their partners as not as capable as they are at organising family life:

> I am probably the one who keeps on top of the calendar and organises who needs to be where. Keeping a note of when is parents' evening, when they need dinner money and that kind of thing. I think he typically does not notice the things that need doing in the way I do. I will notice that the bathroom needs cleaning, but he will get irritated if I leave him lists of jobs. (Chloe)

Partner's Emotional Support. Most leaders share the importance of emotional support from their partners in assisting their management of work-life balance. Deborah articulates how her partner's support is crucial to her: "Personally, I could not do the job without my husband 100 per cent. I could not have done it without him." Lisa highlights how important her partner's pride in her work is to her: "At home

is that I have a husband who is enormously proud of me – family who are proud of me and support what I am doing." Ellie explains how she values her partner's support helps her keep her workload in a healthy perspective:

> Out of school, I have a husband who is very supportive of what I do, which is very important. He is very good at being reasonable with me when I am not being reasonable with myself. He is good at saying to me when I am doing too much, which is very helpful. (Ellie)

Whereas most leaders identify the support of their partners as essential, a few leaders identify help from their friends as significant. However, where there is no support from a partner, friends become very important. In particular, leaders value the support of friends who work in education as people they can trust and understand the job demands. As Anna explains:

> I have two incredibly good friends; they are school leaders as well, and we can have honest conversations. That is absolutely vital where all the guards are down where you can say, "All right. Okay. This is what's happening", and they say, "Well, maybe you should do this" or "Have you thought you have been a bit of an idiot on one level?" It is a safe place. (Anna)

Jill similarly talks about the importance of advice her friends can give her: "I have very close friends as well. My closest friends are in education themselves; they sometimes counsel me." The importance of good friends is elevated when there is no partner to rely on or family, especially when something at work happens out of the norm to disrupt the routine at home. As a headteacher explains:

> I have had very good friends, some very good friends. I suppose they give you a different perspective on what is important. We had a child die in the school the year before last, and that was the only time when the children were little that I actually felt the pressure of working hours. I had been regimented about what everyone would do, and then something different happened, but I guess

that would happen anywhere, but I had to rely on favours from people to be able to support me in doing the bit of the job I needed to do.

Work-life Balance: Rules Employed to Manage Professional Lives

Most participating leaders share the importance of establishing rules to effectively manage work and sustain a healthy work-life balance. The patterns that emerge are 1) establishing working practices to prioritise family, 2) short commuting time, 3) effective diary management and strategic employment of their personal assistant (PA) and 4) restrictions on the use of email, mobile phones and notifications. Mentioned, but not numerically significant finding is putting rules in place to establish a school culture that cultivates a sustainable work-life balance for all staff.

Working Patterns to Prioritise Family

Establishing working patterns that maximise quality time with their family is a priority for most leaders. Putting in rules to delineate working time and time spent with their families is important. Jane articulates, "Making sure that there are boundaries and points is important so you can properly be a mother and not be distracted whilst physically being at home." Most leaders define a work-life balance as dynamic, meaning that work can be intensive in the short term but more balanced in the long term, recognising that workload over a school term is inconsistent and schools benefit from long holidays. Therefore, most leaders accept working long hours during the week and compensate by prioritising quality time with their families at weekends and during the school holidays.

Term time, Monday to Friday. Monday to Friday, term time, most leaders report working 55-60 hours on average, continuing to work in the evening after arriving home. The standard daily routine is waking up between six and six-thirty to arrive at work by seven thirty, usually leaving between five and six o'clock. As Mel outlines:

> I am up at about quarter to six in the morning and out of the house by about half past six, depending on how long getting ready has taken me. Sometimes, I am up earlier than that, but on a typical day, that is about the time my alarm goes off. I am in school around seven o'clock/quarter past seven. I am out the school sometime between six o'clock and seven o'clock (Mel)

However, in weeks when there are evening meetings, headteachers work in excess of 60 hours. Governor meetings, Senior team meetings and Open and Parents' Evenings entail leaders working late in school, sometimes until 10 p.m. Leaders note that evening meetings impact their children more significantly because they arrive home after their children have gone to bed. Jane articulates: "If it is a night when we have got Governor's or Trust Board meetings, I might not be home until about half past nine."

Therefore, most leaders set rules to prioritise time with their families. In the evenings at home, most leaders check and answer work emails. Working at home in the evenings after their children have gone to bed enables leaders to spend time away from work on weekends. Sharon describes how she purposefully works in the evenings to make time for herself and her family at weekends:

> I am happy to sacrifice time in the week. So, very much, the weekends are mine because that is when we are home as a family, and that is when I will do stuff. I do give myself that time. You do need that switch-off time. (Sharon)

Jill explains how working late on a Friday is a strategy she employs to keep the weekend clear from work:

I developed the routine as a senior leader: I would stay at work on a Friday evening and finish everything so I could have a weekend. And even if that meant staying until seven or eight in the evening, that was fine because I decided to do that. Then I am ready for Monday. I clear the work from the week, and then I can have two days to do what I want. (Jill)

Weekends. Purposefully arranging their work schedules, leaders prioritise quality time with their families and switch off from work pressures at weekends. Mel describes setting "very clear boundaries" on when and how she works at the weekend. Jane explicitly describes the weekend as "family time" and emphasises how "that is not going to be impinged on by any kind of work." Susan agrees with Mel and Jane's commitment to making time at the weekend for her family:

My daughter would say I make time for her. Saturdays are our day. And nothing comes between that. There are a lot of sporting events, and the ones at the weekend I never miss. I always make sure that I am there. (Susan)

Chloe describes how important weekend family time is to offset the long hours she can work in the week: "I tend to work long evenings during the week and try to keep as much of the weekend free as possible. I allocate time for family time at the weekends." The importance of role modelling a good work ethic means few leaders, like Deborah, work alongside their children on a Sunday:

I usually work on a Sunday, usually in the afternoon and do a couple of hours but again, as they get older, they are doing homework as well. You could say - it is a work ethic, and you are such a good example. (Deborah)

School Holidays. School holidays are also crucial to most leaders for focus time with their families. The time in the holidays compensates for the long hours during the term time. Chloe recognises how her long working hours are offset by the school holidays:

> Although in this particular leadership role, I work late quite often and long days, I am around to have lots of quality time with my family during school holidays, which has been positive. (Chloe)

Anna also appreciates the opportunity the school holidays provide to spend time with her children and are a genuine benefit of the job:

> The good thing about the job is, of course, school holidays. I am able to be with my children. That compensates in terms of how we spend time during term time. And I see that the times we can spend in the holidays are a great benefit to me, and I am very grateful for them. (Anna)

Mel, who previously worked outside of schools, emphasises that the school holidays are a bonus not enjoyed in other leadership roles:

> My holiday time is precious. It is really, really precious. We plan that carefully, and I try to maximise the holidays as much as possible. Again, more than I was able to before. We can have that uninterrupted family time that is a real opportunity that comes with teaching and does not necessarily come in other professions. (Mel)

Many leaders try to keep most of the school holidays clear from work, minimising both physically being in school, working at home and thinking about work. Deborah articulates:

> I do try to keep the holidays clear. Generally, I just work for a couple of days. I always give my children time and try to make sure I always do something with them individually, as well as doing things all together, so that my children have some special time with me and time as a family together. (Deborah)

Short Commuting Time. Most leaders choose to live near their place of work, with the longest commute being a 30-minute drive, to maximise their use of time. Isabel articulates: "The time I save from commuting is time I can give to work or my family; it feels much more balanced and supportive." Jane similarly has always chosen to live

near her schools: "My decision to work in local schools probably stems from the fact that I do not want to have a huge commute." Many leaders embrace a short or stress-free commute to work as something that positively enhances their well-being, as Lisa articulates:

> I love the fact that I can now turn right out of my drive into Suffolk, which means that I never hit traffic and am driving through beautiful countryside. My drive is about 30 minutes, but I find this gives me time to think myself into the day and to unwind on my way home.

Effective Diary Organisation and Strategic Employment of a Personal Assistant (PA)

Effective diary organisation and the strategic employment of their PA are essential elements of most leaders' management of their workload. Effective diary organisation is broken down into three key aspects: 1) allocating the correct time to complete a task most efficiently, 2) prioritising tasks according to need, and 3) organising tasks according to the energy required to complete them. Jane emphasises the importance of organising work, taking into consideration time and personal energy levels:

> Being as organised as possible is essential, which involves finding ways of categorising, prioritising, and delegating effectively. Integral to this is deciding how much time and energy certain things warrant. You should ensure you have effectively blocked your time and do not over-commit. How to organise your time but also your energy and your headspace makes the job manageable. (Jane)

Deborah shares the importance of setting time limits on tasks to remove the temptation of spending longer on work than is necessary:

> What I try to do now is set deadlines for tasks. I will say, "I will spend half an hour on this task. I will spend half an hour on this task." Otherwise, some of the work gets interesting; what I will do is I will say, "Ooh, look at this," and I have got to stop that because I do not have time. (Deborah)

Mel agrees on the importance of planning time: "My calendar is pretty essential to all that I do on a fundamental level. I structure my week very carefully, and I am very efficient with my time."

By strategically deploying the support of a PA, many leaders recognise their service on their leadership to facilitate their full lives. Leaders identify this crucial support as organising their diaries to fit in with and enable their family life, filtering and prioritising emails for response, calendar organisation to maximise time, and looking after their well-being. Ellie explains how her PA organises her diary to focus her work on Monday and Thursday evenings when her husband picks up and feeds the children: "Working days are usually Mondays and Thursdays when my husband usually has the children. It is my way of catching up, and my PA organises my work to fit in this way." Similarly, Isabel shares how her PA creates flexibility in her schedule to attend her children's events, "I can ask my PA to factor in my diary going to my children's sports day for an hour so there are some gives for being in charge."

Importantly, Jill discusses how deploying her PA to filter and prioritise her emails enables her to work more efficiently: "She filters my emails, she will say, 'I really need you to do this,' or 'must reply to this.'" Working closely with her also means that she has trained her PA to complete tasks that enable her to focus on the areas she can have the most impact:

> I have worked with her for eight years; she lives and breathes everything I do. She picks up a lot of the stuff I could do, but I do not need to because she can do it, allowing me to focus on other things to get more done and have more impact. (Jill)

Effective training and deployment of a PA means a tightly run calendar, translating into better use of time.

A few leaders also value a PA's support for their well-being. As Fran articulates, "One joy of being headteacher is that you actually get a PA. My PA is amazing, who looks after my well-being and even produces magic sweeties when needed." Jill also shares how her PA will forward positive messages in a timely way, improving her outlook: "She might send me something that is a thank you if we have had a tough week - she keeps things to one side, so she is always full of good news. She helps me to get that good balance."

Restrictions on Email, Mobile Phones and Notifications

Most leaders use their personal phones for work but emphasise the importance of purposefully managing mobile phone usage to access work email to prevent work from intruding to the detriment of family life. Leaders explain that having an additional phone for work would increase the complexity of managing their workload by forcing them to compartmentalise their work from their day-to-day lives. Ellie articulates: "A work and home phone would be irritating. I would find it hard to compartmentalise like that." Leaders decide to have work email on their phones to monitor and answer them sooner rather than later, which is identified as an important strategy for managing workload. Karen articulates:

> I have my email on my phone, which is the only way I can keep track and keep up with it. I know some people think that is the worst way to do it, and I should switch everything off. But that works for me; everything merged into one thing rather than trying to keep them compartmentalised. I would rather answer

emails as they come in quickly, sort them and know what is there. I have always merged my email on my phone in order to deal with it. It is what works for me. (Karen)

Furthermore, having access to work email on a personal phone allows most leaders to use time that otherwise would be redundant. Deborah stresses how her phone enables her to make more efficient use of time: "Technology helps because you can be on a train or in a queue somewhere and answer emails, and you have to try to take advantage of those things to be as efficient as you can be."

Jill appreciates how answering her emails on her phone allows her both to keep abreast of her work and to use time productively:

> My partner says, "You are answering your emails while watching the television in the evening. You think that is not working, but really it is." But for me, that helps me to keep on top of things. And if I do not want to look at my e-mails, I do not look. He (her partner) can become quite disciplined about his emails. For me, to have the ability to clear some stuff works to my advantage because I feel like I am not working; it takes five seconds, and I do not mind. (Jill)

Many leaders appreciate imposing cut-off times for answering emails in the evening and holidays is important. As Chloe values placing limits on replying and sending emails in the evening:

> I have tried to enforce the email cut-off times and not be messaging people and replying to emails. I try to keep seven o'clock in the evening to seven o'clock in the morning clear. Sometimes, I am reading emails, but I do not reply to them during these times. I do try and limit that. (Chloe)

Ellie turns off emails in holidays: "I have one phone, and my email is on that. On holiday, I turn my emails off my phone."

A few leaders remove their work email or stop notifications from pushing through to their phones to separate work from home. Jane shares how checking emails on another device means setting time aside and so is less intrusive than having email on her personal phone:

> This summer, I consciously decided to take my work emails off my phone because it is not a school phone. On a Sunday evening, I used to just sort of glance at my phone before going to sleep; that was not helping and not giving me a fresh night's sleep. Being able to come to things in the morning gives me more perspective. I am the sort of person who can usually always be on and available, and removing my emails from my phone has made a big difference. If I am on my iPad and intend to work, I can check them, which is not as intrusive into my personal life. (Jane)

Sharon agrees turning off the notifications means planning time to check email, which helps her to switch off from work:

> I have decided to have school emails on my phone but do not have them as alerts. I must log in to read them. When I first arrived, my email was configured so that every time I got an email, it came up on my phone, and after I changed that. I can access email on my phone if I go into it deliberately, and I feel that is a lot healthier than the constant notifications pushing through. I get so many emails I may never get shut off that way. Now, I do not look all day Saturday, and then I check Sunday morning and Sunday night before I go to bed. (Sharon)

Many leaders share imposing restrictions on when to check emails to demarcate the boundary between home and work is challenging, "So, I am trying", suggests Ellie, who admits she has not entirely succeeded. Headteachers who are unhappy about their work-life balance acknowledge struggling to set boundaries on checking emails. Isabel describes the intrusion of work into their home life in this way as detrimental to her well-being:

> I have a personal phone, I do not have a work phone, and I have my work email on my phone. Emails pop up like notifications. I usually check my email before I go to bed, which I know is really bad, or I have done it through the evening, and then it is probably one of the reasons I cannot go to sleep. When I wake up

in the morning, my phone is already full of the next lot of emails that have come up. I should probably think about doing something about that because it means there is continuity with work that goes on and on. I worry about taking those notifications off because if I get an urgent email, I will not know. I do not really know what the solution to that is. It is something I should be better at. (Isabel)

Changing the School Culture to embed Healthy Working Patterns

A few leaders mention setting rules to establish a whole school culture, which nurtures a good work-life balance, as important to maintaining their own work-life balance. Gemma has established a series of expectations to establish sustainable working patterns for all staff on the length of the working day, the sending and responding of emails, and the organisation of events. Gemma shares how she role models expectations of working hours:

> The only time I have ever been at work after six o'clock is when we have a senior team meeting or a parent's evening, but I am normally out before then, and so are most of the staff. We do not really do long hours – there is an expectation that you are assessed on doing your job, not on the length of hours you put in. I live by that myself. (Gemma)

The rules on emails are:

> There are no weekend e-mails. You are not allowed to send them - nobody sends them at the weekend. You are not allowed to send them past 8 p.m. And actually, we do not send many emails at all. There are rules about face-to-face communication. We have just set up a whole e-mail culture, which means emails are not used for conversations. (Gemma)

Finally, Gemma articulates how important forward planning and communication to staff is to ensure a positive work-life balance for all staff, including herself:

> And we have a bulletin published to communicate in advance about everything happening that week. If something is not in the bulletin, it is not allowed to happen. Nothing's last minute. The things I have set up for their work-life balance make my work-life balance better as well. So that helps. (Gemma)

Mel expresses how at the core of her leadership is a vision to lead a staff with sustainable working patterns. She outlines the expectations about working, emails and individual and school diary organisation. Mel challenges the perceptions of the need to work long hours:

> Teachers often believe that long hours are needed to get the work done. I was quite determined to shift that pattern as quickly as possible and not establish too much of a way of working that was difficult for me to undo. I knew for our school to improve, I needed to have balance and also create more sustainable structures and systems in the school (Mel)

Mel goes on to explain how she is training her staff on how to structure the use of time effectively: "I structure my week very carefully, and I am very efficient with my time, and we are training all staff in our school how to do that because we think that is the heart of creating a sustainable community."

Reflections on Perceptions and Management of Work-life balance

Leaders recognise that leading in an educational system with high levels of accountability can take its toll and remove them physically and mentally from their families. During term time, leaders describe working long hours of roughly 60 hours a week. The amount of responsibility a headteacher assumes is the most significant challenge to leaders' work-life balance. However, most leaders' perceptions of their work-life balance remain positive, informed primarily by the high value they place on their work and the satisfaction they derive from their leadership roles.

The category the school is in and the stage of the career the leader is at prompts different challenges to a leader's work-life balance. Establishing a healthy balance

when a school is graded Inadequate, or RI is challenging due to the extra pressure to drive rapid change. Schools in these categories struggle to recruit staff, and their organisational structures are more chaotic, increasing the workload on leadership. Similarly, the first year of headship is identified as challenging for the leaders participating. Headteachers and executive headteachers highlight that their experiences as senior leaders and previous training did not fully prepare them for the headship, exacerbating the role's challenges.

Crucial to leaders' work-life balance management is the wide range of professional and personal support they draw upon to manage the stress and high workload incumbent on the role of the headteacher. Professionally, leaders primarily identify the importance of their senior team's support in managing their work in school. However, in easing the burden of responsibility, leaders draw upon relationships and networks they establish locally or within their MAT. This professional peer-to-peer support external from their schools provides expert and confidential guidance on issues leaders feel they cannot burden their senior teams with because, as the headteacher, decisions ultimately rest with them.

In sustaining a healthy work-life balance, leaders emphasise the importance of a well-organised diary and setting clear boundaries between work and home. The strategic employment of a PA supports them in focusing on impactful work and enjoying a workable work-life balance. Protecting school holidays and weekends for quality family time is especially important. Most leaders describe how the length of the school holidays compensates for the long hours worked during the week in term time. Leaders share a range of strategies to stop work from disrupting family life. Recognising the

advances of new technologies to help manage work more effectively, leaders discuss the necessity of putting rules on receiving notifications and answering emails, which potentially intrude most often on family life.

Executive headteachers and headteachers recognise the potential of leadership coaches and formal mentors/networks to provide expert guidance, which would help the management of workload. However, of the leaders participating, only a few had or have access to this type of professional support.

Crucially, most leaders strongly emphasise the importance of a supportive partner at home. Leaders who are lone parents successfully substitute the support of a partner with a strong network of friends and high-quality childcare to establish a work-life balance and secure the well-being of themselves and family. The importance of an engaged partner is fundamental to how leaders negotiate the challenges of work and home. Leaders do not describe traditional patterns of the division of domestic labour and instead report more equity in the home and parenting; sharing the parenting and domestic responsibilities creates quality time for them to spend with their children and to complete work. When children are preschool age, leaders describe their reliance on childcare and strongly stress the importance of investing in high-quality childcare that suits the family's needs to minimise mother guilt. Few have families they can rely upon.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter is divided into four sections, situating the findings within the wider academic research: Women's Leadership Careers Prior to Headship; Mothering and the Enactment of Leadership; Reframing the Discourse of Leading and Mothering; and Women's Future Career Aspirations. Each section sets out to address the subsidiary research questions. The findings are situated within the wider academic research on educational leadership, gendered leadership, work-life balance, and motherhood and are reflected upon to answer the research questions. A poststructuralist lens is employed to disconnect gender from biological sex, allowing an analysis of dissonance in normative social practices and challenging essentialist gender binaries.

Section 1: Women's Leadership Careers Prior to Headship

The gender in educational leadership research has predominantly focused on the barriers that women teachers face aspiring for headship and how they have been overcome (Coleman, 2002; 2011; Fuller, 2009; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016; Showunmi, 2022; Torrence et al., 2017). The interconnectedness of women's personal and professional lives is well documented, as are the difficulties women face combining professional lives and motherhood (Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2009; 2010; Moorosi, 2019; Porter & Fahrenwald, 2022; Smith, 2016). In addition, there is extensive research on motherhood and how the patriarchal construct of motherhood limits women's careers and negatively impacts their well-being (Horne & Breitkreuz, 2018; O'Reilly, 2020; Rich, 2021). My findings on how a cohort of women achieved headship whilst mothering are situated within this literature and reflected upon to

answer the subsidiary research questions related to women's leadership careers: 1) Are there patterns in the career trajectories and experiences of secondary women leaders who are mothers? 2) How do women head and executive headteachers describe their career and leadership experience? In exploring women's career journeys, the section is divided into four areas. The first explores the relationship between women's serendipitous career planning, self-efficacy and ambition. The second discusses the professional factors, at a school and national level, that can empower women's agency to act upon their self-efficacy. The third part explores how women's personal relationships support their career advancement by enabling women to juggle a career and motherhood. The final part explores motherhood's influence by disrupting and advancing women's careers.

Women's Career Journeys: Serendipitous Career Planning, Self-efficacy and Ambition

My findings confirm previous research, which identifies differences in women's and men's approaches to career advancement and construct of ambition but not in their occupational self-efficacy (Hartman & Barber, 2020; Ribbons, 2008). Participating leaders describe a serendipitous journey to headship, taking advantage of opportunities rather than having a purposeful plan. In accord with previous research, my findings suggest that hegemonic discourse on leadership and messages on the incompatibility of motherhood and leadership communicated by school cultures framed by neoliberal discourses continue to reduce women's agency to act upon their self-efficacy, disrupting women's careers to headship. (Coleman, 2022; Moorosi, 2019; Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022; Torrence et al., 2017). My findings also demonstrate that women's careers are influenced by how they reframe ambition in

terms of happiness, well-being and work-life balance rather than by power, performance and end goals (Harman & Sealy, 2017; Hartman & Barber, 2020), thereby influencing their approach to career advancement.

Serendipitous Career Planning

Leaders in my study construct their careers within a women's educational leadership discourse by conforming with perceived ways of women approaching their careers in an unplanned or opportune approach (Coleman, 2002; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a; Torrence et al., 2017). Chloe articulates, "I never really had a plan; it was never my plan to be a headteacher or setting out with that to be the goal." Chloe's approach is a consistent pattern across the participants' career trajectories. Leaders advanced through middle and senior leadership positions by taking opportunities as they arose, only aspiring for headship once in senior leadership. Similar to the women in Porter & Fahrenwald's study (2022), their career trajectories to headship were a series of ups and downs with an overall progression forward.

A serendipitous approach to career planning deviates from the standard model Ribbons (2008) presents to explain the careers of headteachers. Ribbons suggests that would-be headteachers, on entry to teaching, consciously follow carefully planned career paths, seeking out experience in leadership roles to facilitate their promotion to headship. Although Ribbens (2008) explores national deviations from the standard model, he does not explore whether there are differences between men's and women's careers. My findings contribute to the educational leadership evidence base

by providing an analysis of women's careers, challenging the suitability of a standard model to explain teachers' progression to headship.

Women's Self-efficacy

A salient finding is that a lack of self-efficacy does not explain women's serendipitous approach to career planning. Leaders' reflections on their careers reveal self-belief in the assertive language they use. Lisa shares, "I had all the confidence", or as Gemma articulates, "There was no real barrier apart from deciding". In contrast, educational leadership research attributes women's lack of career planning to a lack of self-efficacy (Coleman, 2007; Kaparou & Bush, 2007). My findings suggest that women demonstrate self-efficacy, believing they can accomplish challenging leadership roles; rather, that belief is not always acted upon. One of the reasons that influence women's agency is the hegemonic discourses of leadership (Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022) and the implicit and explicit messages certain school organisational structures communicate about the incongruity of leadership and mothering (Coleman, 2022; Moorosi, 2019; Torrence, et al., 2017). School organisational structures, which cause women to modify or adapt their career intentions, are explored more deeply in the section 'Motherhood and Gender: Prejudice and Discrimination.'

My findings confirm that the incorporation of hegemonic discourses about leadership continue to stall some women's advancement by reducing women's power and agency (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022). This is reflected in my findings on leaders' apprehension of being taken seriously as a headteacher because of being a woman. Lisa articulates, "You need to get passed thinking, oh God, I cannot apply for a headteacher position,

which results from doubting if you can be taken seriously and have credibility." Mel describes "overcoming her nervousness", reflecting a belief that maybe leadership is not for her. In addition, a few leaders describe how they felt the need to learn more than their men counterparts and to conquer self-doubt before applying for headship. Sharon identifies as a "tragic woman", learning all the jobs of leadership before applying. Women's apprehension and nervousness demonstrate that a discourse of women's leadership as lacking remains, exerting influence over women's agency and explaining why some women's careers are slower or do not progress to headship or executive headship (Fuller, 2009; Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022; Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022).

A small cohort of participating leaders is millennials. Limited findings on their career trajectories further reinforce how gendered performativity is not isolated but rather intersects with and is shaped by other social identities (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). Jane's comment, "Maybe I am not good enough or old enough," reflects awareness of how her age diminishes her status further. Intersectionality of other demographic categories may also further impact the marginalisation of women (Edge et al., 2022; Hartman & Barber, 2020) as women experience the workplace differently depending on their ethnicity, class, age and other social locations (Hartman & Barber, 2020). However, FL graduates, the youngest in the sample of leaders, aspired early in their careers to senior school leadership and headship by joining the FL programme. Although too few to make any rigorous conclusions, the FL graduates' agency early on in their career may suggest shifts in the performativity of gender and emerging resistance to leadership discourses that position men rather than women as leaders.

Reframing Ambition

Women's approach to career planning has been explained by a lack of ambition (Coleman, 2002; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a; Torrence et al., 2017). My findings make an important contribution to the literature by suggesting that women are transgressing an essentialist gender discourse to reframe ambition rather than being unambitious. Ambition, often constructed within a male discourse, is defined as the pursuit of promotion, prioritisation of career goals and willingness to make sacrifices (Harman & Sealy, 2017). Participating leaders' narratives do not align with this construct of ambition. Rather, leaders' reflections on their careers reveal more of an unfocused drive to succeed, portraying ambition as a state rather than an end goal. Fran shares, "Teaching is an interesting job. I never set out to be a headteacher." Most leaders emphasise their contentment with their current roles to explain why they are not seeking further career advancement. In addition, leaders describe making a difference and achieving a work-life balance as indicators of career success, in line with other studies on women's careers (Harman & Sealy, 2017; Porter & Fahrenwald, 2022). Fran's explanation of her motivations reveals a prioritisation of value orientations rather than the prestige of the role, "I did not particularly want to be a headteacher for the status or position; I wanted to be a headteacher here because I had a really strong feeling for the school." The status and prestige of the role are not considerations in leaders' ascension to headship. Rather, for most leaders, an important consideration is establishing a healthy work-life balance. Research on Millennials suggests that younger men leaders are also transgressing normative gender discourse on ambition to prioritise work-life balance over power and status (Edge, 2014; Edge et al., 2022). My findings confirm the need for more gender-

inclusive considerations of success and a reframing of ambition (Harman & Sealy, 2017) to better support women and younger leaders to progress to headship.

Enablers of Women's Careers: Professional Factors

This study highlights women do not lack self-efficacy, but they do not always act on their belief in their own leadership, highlighting the importance of mentoring women for career advancement (Hartman & Barber, 2020). This study concurs with previous educational leadership research on the relational nature of women's careers (Bimrose, et al., 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017), in which women conform to a dominant gender discourse (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022). This study highlights the importance of senior leadership experience, headteacher mentoring and women role models, strengthening the literature describing the professional support that accelerates women's careers (Coleman, 2011; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Fuller, 2009; 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017).

Senior Leadership Experience

Constructing their motivations for headship within a women's educational leadership discourse, participating leaders conform to the perception that women seek headship for altruistic reasons (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Torrence et al., 2017). Leaders describe being driven by the desire to improve the life chances of the school's community, as Mel shares, "I felt I could make a difference here." Accession to headship is facilitated by senior leadership experience, which makes the role of headship more visible. Visualising the power of headship to make a difference, at a

close hand, significantly changes perceptions of the role, encouraging women to apply for headship.

Women's reflections on their motivations for leadership within an altruistic discourse rather than one about status and power might be seen as evidence of women incorporating an essentialist gender discourse that leadership is not for them (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022). Oppenheim-Shachar (2022) explains how women's reluctance to pursue headship for status and power reveals women's incorporation of an essentialist discourse that positions women in supporting and caring roles rather than those that exert power. This also may explain women teachers' reluctance to leave the classroom and direct contact with children for the often-non-teaching role of headteacher (Smith, 2011a). In accord with Smith's (2011a) research, many participating leaders explain the satisfaction they derived from teaching as the reason why they did not consider headship earlier in their careers. The following comment from Isabel foregrounds the importance of enabling women to realise the potential of headship to overcome reservations and aspire to headship: "I saw headship as something much more remote from the classroom, and it took me a while to mature and see the biggest leverage in any school improvement is within senior leadership".

No participating headteachers are currently seriously considering executive headship. The executive headteachers in the study value how their positions enable them to exert even greater influence to encourage social mobility. Jill explains, "The opportunities you get are to transform those schools where children were literally out of real encouragement." The underrepresentation of women at executive level of

school leadership (Belger, 2022; Fuller, 2017) underlines the importance of exposing more women headteachers to the potential of executive positions.

Finally, the attainability of headship from senior leadership encourages women to resist the regulatory mechanisms of an essentialist gender discourse to apply for headship. Crucially, demystifying the headteacher's role emerges as an important step in encouraging women. As Fran articulates: "The closer you get to something, the more you see that you can do it, and then you are like, "Well, why do I not do that?" By providing a realistic view of headship, senior leadership provides opportunities and focuses women's ambitions (Fuller, 2009). Gemma explains the impact of observing an excellent headteacher, "Working under a headteacher who was very good, in an excellent school, someone who knew what that should look like, that is what got me to be a headteacher. I saw how it could be done." These findings confirm the importance of exposing women to established leadership to support their career advancement (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017).

Headteacher Mentoring

The power of being brought 'inside' through close mentoring by the headteacher has a powerful influence on developing the agency of women leaders. Positioned as 'outsiders' by a Western hegemonic leadership model, women can incorporate feelings of vulnerability and self-doubt (Blackmore, 2022). Most leaders discuss the importance of encouragement and guidance in giving them the agency to apply for headship. Jane emphasises her headteacher's crucial role in her career advancement: "It was the fact that I had a headteacher who was very much, 'Of course, you can,'

that perhaps gave me the nudge to think, "Yeah, maybe I could do this." Being part of a senior team, therefore, not only allows leaders to see first-hand the nature of the role but also provides access to the headteacher and the opportunity to be mentored by them. The importance of mentoring from the headteacher for aspiring women is well covered in academic research (Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). Women are often encouraged or inspired by the headteachers they work for, who also often function as supportive role models (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). The value that leaders place on encouragement from their headteachers confirms the relational nature of women's careers (Bimrose, et al., 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017).

Headteachers can also play a significant role in developing their senior team's knowledge and skills by creating opportunities to share the enactment of aspects of headship. By giving women deputy headteachers autonomy over key strategic priorities, headteachers can encourage them to step out of their comfort zone. Chloe articulates, "The headteacher at the time gave me a lot of autonomy. I was able to develop the curriculum, ethos, and systems because I was starting from scratch, which was a really valuable leadership experience." The power of direct mentoring by the headteacher, especially of marginalised groups, is underlined in Johnson & Campbell-Stephen's (2013) study exploring the views of BME school leaders in London. BME men and women are positioned even more as leadership 'outsiders' than white women; the experience of being brought 'inside' is identified as the most important professional development (Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2013).

Women Leadership Role Models

Most leaders highlight the importance of women role models, which accords with the research on women in educational leadership (Coleman, 2011; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Fuller, 2009; 2014; 2016). Headteachers corroborate that observing women lead confirms that, as women, they can and should lead. As Olivia articulates, "A head I worked for was reasonably defining. There was quite a lot from her that I did not want to pick up; however, she was at least a role model of a female head, which I had not seen many of." Women role models help women resist a discourse that women's leadership is lacking (Blackmore, 2022; Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2014). These findings concur with Coleman & Campbell-Stephens (2010), who recognise that role models inspire aspiring leaders by enabling them to recognise the qualities in themselves that can bring value to their leadership. Seeing women succeed perpetuates a cycle of achievement and succession (Fuller, 2013). Fuller's (2013) research on the distribution of women headteachers suggests more equal representation of women in the regions surrounding London can be attributed to the implementation of equal opportunity policies by the Inner London Education Authority, creating role models, which made women believe they could succeed engendering a "cycle of success and succession" (Fuller, 2013, p. 25). In areas with few women headteachers, there are few women role models (Fuller, 2013).

A few leaders discuss how mentoring by women leaders provided advice and support to boost their career aspirations. Lisa articulates, "At every stage of my career, I can point to people, always women incidentally, that mentored and guided me at different points." The research proposes that men and women rely more on same-sex mentors and further highlights the importance of women role models (Hartman & Barber, 2020). However, considering the underrepresentation and regional differences of senior

women leaders in schools (Fuller, 2013), new pathways for women to become aligned with mentors and role models need to be created (Harman & Barber, 2020). The development of social media platforms, like Twitter, offers the potential to connect women teachers and leaders.

Additionally, women seeing women headteachers who are also mothers challenges the dominant discourse on motherhood, which positions mothers in the home or lower-status employment. Women role modelling how leadership and motherhood can be performed not only reassures women aspiring to headship but can also provide practical guidance. Sharon articulates, "The female headteacher, she had a child, and that made a massive difference, that helped a lot to make me think, I could do that". This study provides a unique contribution to the literature by making visible headteachers who are leading and mothering, thus role-modelling how leadership and mothering can be navigated together.

Mentors and Networks

Most leaders recognise the value of mentoring; however, only a few headteachers had formal mentoring until positive mentoring relationships developed with their previous headteacher. A salient finding of my study is that despite the importance of mentoring highlighted in educational leadership (Coleman, 2002; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a) and private sector research (Hartman & Barber, 2020) women's access to mentoring remains at the best ad hoc. Suggesting there has been little change in the last 20 years in the availability of mentoring and career guidance for women teachers and leaders (Coleman, 2002; 2022; Smith, 2011a).

When recruitment and retention of headteachers are challenging, the education system needs to invest in succession planning, which decreases the gap between men and women in leadership roles (Torrence et al., 2017; Coleman, 2022). Mentoring is an important way to support women's leadership succession planning (Hartman & Barber, 2020) by building women's leadership behaviours and agency to apply for headship (Bimrose et al., 2014; Hartman & Barber, 2020; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). The importance of mentoring questions whether it should be left to individuals or if mentoring needs to be more formalised and institutionalised to ensure equity of access and coverage (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017).

Fast Track Leadership Programmes. Evidence from this small cohort of FL indicates the advantages of broader systemic interventions in accelerating women's careers into leadership. These leaders highlight how the FL network developed leadership knowledge and skills:

> The actual training and development I benefited from, coming through the fast-track route and the additional support for the first five years, were really influential in terms of my thinking and accessing high-quality training and a network of support. (Jane)

Crucially, leaders highlight how the training catalysed their self-efficacy into action. Gemma explains, "The Future Leader program was what made me think I would be able to do it. It provided me with a network, support, knowledge, and skills." Training and development programmes, which create networking opportunities for women, can

offer women greater organisational access, opportunity and visibility (Hartman & Barber, 2020). The participating FL graduates achieved headship at a younger age than the other participating leaders, suggesting that such fast-track programmes may help accelerate the careers of underrepresented groups (Jones, 2010).

The Influence of Family Life: Enabling Career Advancement

My findings confirm responsibilities for managing families, including balancing paid work and care, remain gendered. Leaders are seen to be conforming to the dominant gender discourse in the ways their career decisions continue to be highly influenced by particular family circumstances, and family lives across career stages (Coleman, 2011; Guihen, 2018; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). As such, an essentialist gender discourse continues to influence leaders (Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011b; Edge, 2014; Fuller, 2013; 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). However, my findings demonstrate a more complex picture. Leaders and their partners are seen to transgress the essentialist discourse, which positions women in the home as carers by sharing domestic and caring responsibilities.

In contrast to previous research (Smith, 2011a; 2011b; 2016; Fuller, 2009; 2017; Coleman, 2002; 2005; 2011), leaders' partners in this way play a crucial part in enabling women's careers. For many leaders, their family lives support rather than act as an obstacle to their career advancement. This finding uniquely contributes to the literature suggesting that the hegemonic discourses on gender dualism, which position women in the private sphere as carers and men in the public sphere as the breadwinners, are being challenged and upsetting traditional power dynamics.

The Importance of Partnership

Most leaders stress that a partner's support at home is on par with professional encouragement as a significant factor in their career advancement. Jane articulates, "I am fortunate to have a husband who has very much championed my career and given me the opportunities to go for these promotions as they have arisen." The salient finding is that when women and their men partners resist binary gendered expectations on parenting and paid employment, emotional, physical, and cognitive space is opened in which women can advance their careers. Jill shares how influential the decision for her husband to work part-time was in enabling her career:

> It just worked for me and removed a whole host of pressure because I did not have to look at my watch for the first time to worry about childcare. I did not have to do any of that because my partner picked her up, which really helped. I could really focus on what I wanted to achieve professionally. (Jill)

These findings significantly diverge from gender in educational leadership research, highlighting the tension mothers often face trying to advance their careers whilst managing caring and domestic responsibilities (Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2009; Mckillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011b). The resilience of essentialist binaries in these studies (Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2009; and Smith, 2011b) may not be surprising as they were conducted over a decade ago. However, even McKillop and Moorosi (2017) identify colleagues' and friends' support and encouragement, rather than that from a partner, as a significant factor in enhancing women's careers and decision-making.

Many leaders' husbands reduce their hours of paid work to support child-rearing. In doing so, they transgress the dominant essentialist gender discourse, which positions fathers as the primary earner (Kelland et al., 2022). Negotiations with partners over the division of paid work and care are important in encouraging many participating leaders to apply for headship. Lisa shares, "We talked about my ambitions for headship a lot before I applied, with the children too, that my being a headteacher would mean things might change." A few partners left paid employment to become the primary carer; Jane explains, "When I had my first daughter, he went part-time. A couple of years afterwards, when there were major redundancies, he voluntarily became a househusband." These findings significantly contrast with previous research, which demonstrates the resilience of gendered expectations by demonstrating that men's careers are prioritised over women's (Fuller, 2009; Smith, 2011b). Often, this translated into women, regardless of their professional role, accommodating their careers for partners, even changing jobs to follow their partners (Fuller, 2009; Smith, 2011b).

Although research suggests that fathers' attitudes to their careers and childcare have outpaced their actions (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Birkett & Forbes, 2018; Eagly & Carli, 2007), my findings suggest more alignment. Thus, my findings make an important contribution to the literature suggesting men's actions are resisting essentialist gendered discourse that prioritises men's/father's careers over women's/mother's (Kelland et al., 2022), allowing a reconfiguration of how families organise paid work and care.

Personal Growth Through Challenging Family Circumstances

My findings suggest that challenging personal situations can be a turning point in women's careers, prompting them to apply for promotion and strengthening the literature, which suggests women's careers are intricately linked to circumstances in their personal lives (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). Overcoming personal challenges enables personal awareness and growth, which can empower women. Lisa shares how working through a period of mental ill health developed her self-awareness and resilience: "I just got to know myself pretty well, and that is why I knew I was ready for headship. I learnt what my weaknesses were. I now know when it is time to step back or do something for myself." Olivia concurs that going through challenging personal experiences, in her case, divorcing the father of her children, developed resilience and courage: "When I changed my personal circumstances, I became more courageous and empowered within myself." Furthermore, Olivia's experience aligns with the research, suggesting that women's careers, unlike men's, may develop in a positive direction after divorce (Folke & Rickne, 2020). In some cases, divorce for women who are struggling to combine household demands and a career can be a positive life development by reducing tensions at home (Folke & Rickne, 2020).

The need for financial security prompted by a change in personal circumstance, also motivated participating leaders to apply for headship. A few leaders discuss how becoming a single parent through divorce was a key turning point because of the pressure to sustain a certain quality of life for their children, as Jill articulates:

> I went through a divorce when my eldest child was a toddler, so I became a single parent, and that was massive because I promised myself and her that the quality of her life would not be worse just because I was a single parent.

> That gave me an inner drive to achieve more at work or go for promotions that before I might have taken a bit more time over. (Jill)

Previous research (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011b) demonstrates that events in women's personal lives often slow down, halt or disrupt women's careers. My findings confirm that women's careers are influenced considerably by family life; however, participating leaders' experiences suggest that even challenging changes in family circumstances can be empowering and enable personal growth and increase determination to pursue promotion. Although my findings may be explained by the women's high levels of self-efficacy, as women who have achieved headship 'against the odds' (Coleman, 2001), previous research (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011b) has tended to overlook this aspect, focusing more on how the women's close connection to family is limiting.

The Influence of Motherhood: Barriers and Empowerment

Despite the study's homogenous sample of white heterosexual women, there was a great deal of heterogeneity and idiographic detail in the influence leaders' experiences of becoming a mother had on their careers. Motherhood is acknowledged as a major factor influencing women's leadership career decisions (Aarntzen et al., 2019; Collins, 2021; Rich, 2021), including women's decisions to apply for headship (Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011b; Edge, 2014; Fuller, 2013; 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017).

The Motherhood Penalty: How Motherhood Stalls Women's Careers.

Motherhood, for many leaders, slows down their leadership careers, showing the resilience of essentialist gender discourse of motherhood and strengthening the

findings of educational leadership research (Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011b; Edge, 2014; Fuller, 2013; 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Torrence et al., 2017). Many leaders report delaying applications or turning down promotions when their children are pre-school age or when they are pregnant. Mel explains her decision not to apply for headship earlier in her career: "I know I would not have applied to be a headteacher when the children were younger. I did not feel I wanted to make that much of a sacrifice." Lisa highlights the significance of becoming pregnant in her decision, "I was invited to be an associate on the senior leadership team, which I initially accepted, and then turned it down because I fell pregnant." Mel's and Lisa's decision to delay their careers resonates with the research on motherhood, which explains how intensive mothering acts as a mechanism to reduce career aspirations to prioritise caregiving (Aarntzen et al., 2019; Collins, 2021; Rich, 2021). Women choose to prioritise child-rearing responsibilities, stalling or halting their careers by modifying their aspirations and relinquishing professional responsibilities (Smith, 2011b; 2016). Recent research on mid-career teachers confirms the resilience of the normative discourse of motherhood, as women, distinct from men, perceive being a parent as incompatible with school leadership (Muller et al., 2021).

Motherhood and Work: Maternal Sacrifice

Many leaders refer to the construct of maternal sacrifice in their narratives outlining their career decisions following the birth of their children (Horne & Breitkreuz, 2018). References to sacrificial behaviours confirm the resilience of the discourse of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), which dictates that only the biological mother can fulfil the child's needs and that the child's needs must always come first. Mothers, therefore,

rather than fathers, make sacrifices (Horne & Breitkreuz, 2018; O'Reilly, 2020). Leaders' unwillingness to make sacrifices motivates their career decisions to step down or move sideways to achieve a better work-life balance. However, their perceptions of what they are sacrificing are complex, including an unwillingness to sacrifice their job satisfaction, well-being, or time with their children. Leaders' perceptions of what they sacrifice do not fit neatly in the two positions identified in previous research: delaying or giving up one's career to spend time at home or sacrificing time at home to pursue one's career (Horne & Breitkreuz, 2018). Instead, participating leaders respond by making various sacrifices in both spheres to create manageable solutions that meet their children's needs and, as much as possible, their own fulfilment (Horne & Breitkreuz, 2018). In doing so, even though many leaders may have delayed applying for headship, they are able to resist the regulatory mechanisms of intensive mothering to give up their careers to prioritise their child's development (Horne & Breitkreuz, 2018).

Interestingly, one of the leaders who discusses their unwillingness to make sacrifices by stepping up to headship when her children were young is in a same-sex relationship. Her discussion of sacrifice informs the feminist socio-cultural interpretation of maternal sacrifice by suggesting the strength of the resilience of intensive mothering in a same-sex relationship. Although her partner is a stay-at-home mother, her language reflects similar expectations about her performance of mothering as a mother in a heterosexual relationship. There is limited research on lesbian mothering. Examining how lesbian mothers incorporate gendered discourse in the performativity of mothering provides an interesting opportunity for future research.

In this study, many women explain how school cultures intensified the sacrifices they had to make following the birth of their children by enforcing expectations of long working hours beyond the working day, limited access to flexible working and expectations of holding multiple roles. The next section, Prejudice and Discrimination, explores how organisational cultures hinder women's careers.

A structural barrier that can intensify the sacrifices women must make on becoming mothers is the lack of affordable, high-quality organised childcare. Although most leaders foreground the importance of childcare, they do not identify the lack of available high-quality childcare as a barrier to their career progression. Horne & Breitkreuz (2018) demonstrate that mothers' sacrifices are increased when women's participation in the workforce is not matched by high-quality, affordable childcare.

Motherhood and Gender: Prejudice and Discrimination

None of the leaders in this study reports examples of overt sexism when applying for headship or as a barrier to their leadership careers, suggesting a positive impact of the Equality Act 2010 (Gov.uk, 2010), which outlaws discrimination towards gender and maternity. The bulk of the research on women headteachers was conducted before the introduction of the Equality Act 2010 (Gov.uk, 2010). Coleman (2002; 2007), Fuller (2009; 2013) and Smith (2011a) recount women's experience of overt discrimination. Coleman (2007), Fuller (2009; 2013) and Coleman and Campbell-Stevens (2010) all report women's experiences of sexist attitudes within the job application or promotion processes. None of the leaders recounts experiencing direct

discrimination relating to their maternal status in questions at interview about having a family or managing childcare, which deviates from previous research (Fuller, 2009).

However, most leaders discuss the challenges of experiencing, if not overt, a more subtle and complex discrimination, which is more accurately described as 'second generation' bias (Ibarra et al., 2013). Second-generation bias refers to features of working life that create a culture in which women fail to reach their potential (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Many participating leaders describe working in schools whose organisational structures increased the sacrifices mothers needed to make, negatively influencing their career aspirations. Expectations of working long hours beyond the working day, little support for managing workload and unwillingness to offer flexible working emerge from my study as the most important barriers schools present for working mothers. These findings align with research conducted over the last ten years (Coleman, 2005a; Coleman, 2011; Fuller, 2013; 2014; Torrence et al., 2017), demonstrating how 'second generation' bias (Ibarra et al., 2013) slows down and halts women's leadership careers.

School cultures with embedded expectations of long working hours beyond the normal working day intensify the sacrifices women feel they need to make in time spent with their own children. Managing the incurring guilt can then negatively impact women's well-being. A Sharon reflects:

> When I went back into the leadership team after the birth of my child, there were no allowances. You had to be in for seven thirty meetings, you had to be in

school until eight o'clock. There was just no understanding that you had a life or that there might be things going on. I found it really, really, difficult and became quite ill, to be quite honest, at that time with the expectations. (Sharon)

Expectations of long hours suit, as Coleman (2002; 2011) explained 20 years ago, men or women without dependent-aged children. Perpetuation of this type of work culture, under sustained pressure from the system, makes leading secondary schools problematic for parents and even more so for mothers (Muller et al., 2021). Such cultures reinforce a discourse of leadership incompatible with motherhood. Fuller's (2014) research also underlines how the current education context, which necessitates women perform multiple demanding roles of mother, leader, and homemaker, deters women teachers from applying for headship.

Sharon's experience is not isolated. Many leaders report schools offering no support or amendments to workload management or working patterns, which resulted in them stepping away from senior leadership after the birth of their child. Deborah explains how she resigned following the birth of her second daughter because of the lack of support to manage her workload:

> I had one child in my first assistant head role, and I went part-time. There was no job sharing. Rather foolishly, I was not offered one and did not think to ask for one. I did that for two years and then had my second daughter. At that point, I realised two children under two and doing an assistant headship, five days' work in three days, was not really working, so I resigned. (Deborah)

At the time of her child's birth, Jane was head of English and an assistant headteacher. The refusal of the headteacher to allow her to be an assistant headteacher, rather than this role as well as the head of English, led her to resign and make a sideways career

move. These findings align with research highlighting the negative impact school-level organisational cultures can have on women's educational leadership careers, especially when they return to leadership positions from maternity leave (Coleman, 2011; Torrence et al., 2017; Smith, 2016).

Leaders' experiences strengthen Gascoigne's (2019) conclusions that the implementation of flexible working in secondary schools is ad hoc. Isabel's flexible working request to leave early on a Friday to pick her daughter up at half past three was denied and only eventually offered if she agreed to be moved down on the pay scale. Such experiences create implicit and explicit messages that motherhood is incompatible with school leadership. The demands currently on school leaders operating in a high stake accountability context, with tight budgets and teacher shortages, mean flexible working requests are often turned down (Gascoigne, 2019), potentially with damaging consequences for mothers who are attempting to create manageable solutions that meet their children's needs and the demands of leadership careers — ultimately reducing the pool of available leaders and teachers.

The type of schools many leaders are appointed headteachers may also reveal structural gendered discrimination. Six participants were appointed headteacher when the school was graded RI or Inadequate by Ofsted. Headteachers leading schools graded Inadequate or RI are under additional external pressure to improve the school rapidly; failure to do so can lead to headteachers losing their jobs (Craig, 2022). Furthermore, most participating leaders work in schools serving poor communities, which are more likely to be under-performing and under extra external scrutiny (Allen-Kinross, 2019). These findings may confirm the glass cliff theory that women are more

likely to be appointed to lead organisations with a higher risk level (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). However, the narratives of headteachers imply choice and agency in leading the schools they do, articulating a strong moral obligation to equity and describing the opportunities to turn a school around or accelerate social mobility as a "privilege" and "honour". A commitment to social justice informs leaders' decisions to work in schools located in economically and socially disadvantaged areas, which is articulated in Anna's comment:

> You can offer things to the community that they would not have without you. This is just one of the most precious jobs you can do. I feel privileged to do it. I cannot imagine doing anything else, really. (Anna)

Moorosi et al. (2018) confirm that gendered employment practices continue to influence women's achievement and what schools women are appointed to lead (Moorosi et al., 2018). BME women leading schools serving disadvantaged BME communities may have less to do with choice than because of their own status and the employment opportunities their status determines (Moorosi et al., 2018). However, leaders' narratives demonstrate agency and choice over the schools they lead, strengthening the argument that the leadership position of white women is packaged with less oppression (Moorosi et al., 2018) and confirming that structural intersectionality is experienced differently by white women (Crenshaw, 1991).

Pregnancy and Maternity: Sacrifice and Prejudice

All participating leaders took the full or almost full allocation of maternity leave available to them at the birth of each of their children. Leaders reflecting on maternity leave do not suggest that this time away from work had a detrimental effect on their

careers, either by positioning them unequally at home or slowing down their career advancement. Neither does maternity leave appear to limit the number of children. Most participating leaders have two or more children; however, only a few headteachers plan to grow their families.

My findings indicate that structurally, maternity policy appears to be assisting rather than intensifying mothers' sacrifices, which deviates from previous research in educational leadership (Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2009; Smith, 2016). Most participating leaders do not express guilt in taking maternity leave, neither reporting that the period of time was too short nor that the leave negatively impacted their careers. Most leaders had their children whilst in middle and senior leadership. A few women had their children whilst a headteacher. Although the cohort is too small to draw conclusions, these women note that the experience of taking maternity leave whilst a headteacher was different. Taking maternity leave whilst a headteacher engendered more guilt, relating to their concerns about neglecting professional responsibilities. Conceptions of the headteacher as ultimately responsible and irreplaceable underpinned leaders' guilt, as reflected in the comment below:

> It is interesting being pregnant as a headteacher. It has been quite interesting because this time around, the guilt I felt was even worse than the guilt I felt when I fell pregnant previously. You just feel so responsible when you invest so many hours of your week committing to a job. It is not the same as teachers on maternity; you just replace them with a supply teacher. With the headteacher, it is quite a different prospect. I was quite nervous telling the staff I would be off, and I felt quite guilty about the senior leadership team having to step up in my absence.

The comment underlines the enduring expectation of the headteacher being indispensable and the mother as the primary caregiver needing to take the more extended period of leave (Atkinson, 2017). The dual impact of discourses positioning

women as primary carers and headteachers as indispensable deter mothers from stepping up to headship (Smith, 2016; Torrence et al., 2017).

The extension of maternity leave has been criticised for reinforcing binary conceptions of parenting by defining the mother as the primary carer, not necessarily improving women's workplace equality and restricting their family choices (Coleman, 2002; Gatrell et al., 2015; Smith, 2016). Fuller (2009) suggests that maternity policy explains why women headteachers are more likely than men to have only one child because of the length of time women, in comparison to men, are expected to take away from work. My findings do not confirm that maternity leave restricts women's choices over their family or career advancement; however, they confirm the gulf in parents' take-up of maternity and paternity leave. Ordinary Paternity Leave, introduced in 2003, entitles fathers to one to two weeks of paid leave (Gov.uk, 2022b), which all leaders' partners take. Even though there was an entitlement for fathers to take up twenty-six weeks of additional leave (Gov.uk, 2010b) if the mother returned to work, no leaders' husbands, in line with normative practice in England, accessed this provision (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Moss & O'Brien, 2019; Smith, 2016). Fathers infrequently access leave due to cultural and economic barriers (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Moss & O'Brien, 2019; Smith, 2016). My findings, therefore, align with normative practice on the division of leave following the birth of children. However, as described in section three, unequal division of care in the first year of their children's lives does not transfer into an unequal division of responsibilities in the home. My findings suggest an important shift has happened since Coleman's (2002) study, as leaders' husbands take equal responsibility for care, disrupting the assumption that women will not only bear children

but will subsequently care for them and even step down from full-time employment outside the home to assume childcare responsibilities.

The introduction of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (Gov.uk, 2022a), drawing on Scandinavian policies, is an attempt to challenge binary hegemonic discourses about women as caregivers and men as breadwinners by changing the language of 'maternity' and paternity' to 'parental' and providing more equitable opportunities for both parents to care for their children. The cohort of leaders who have been pregnant since the introduction of SPL is too small to make any robust conclusions about its impact. However, the leaders who have had children since the introduction of SPL report sharing the leave with their partner. This is perhaps not surprising since the women are the family's breadwinners. One of the criticisms of SPL is the lack of funding beyond statutory provision for men, unlike in Iceland or Sweden, which is one of the reasons for the low take-up in England (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Strand, 2018). When women are the main breadwinner, there are fewer financial implications of sharing leave with their partners on lower salaries. The introduction of Shared Parental Pay in 2022 (Gov.uk, 2022a) attempts to address the financial barriers to men sharing leave.

Motherhood Empowerment: How Motherhood Enhances Women's Careers

A few leaders' actions and narratives challenge the dominant social discourse of motherhood to reframe motherhood as a site of empowerment, which advances women's leadership careers (O'Reilly, 2020). These leaders explain how becoming a mother was a turning point in their careers and decision-making. Jill shows, "When I

had my first child, I was determined to do both (be a mother and a leader), and I decided to become a headteacher." Jill's choice of words clearly conveys the agency and authority that 'empowered mothering' confers (O'Reilly, 2020). Similarly, Jane reflects on how the birth of each of her children prompts her to reevaluate her choices, with a clear sense that becoming a mother gives her control over those choices: "Having my own children at each venture has made me re-evaluate my roles, the impact I have been having and balance that I have had. Each time I have changed schools or roles, having a child has been key." Similarly, Gemma's experience of becoming a mother for the first time defines mothering as a site of power, "I got pregnant, which is definitely one of the reasons I am headteacher. Motherhood gives you more confidence. It did for me, anyway. I got another perspective, and I just thought, why not?" Becoming a mother clearly confers agency and control over their choices and identity for these women.

These findings deviate from previous research on women headteachers, which emphasises the conflict between motherhood and leadership careers (Coleman, 2002; 2011; Fuller, 2014; Smith, 2011b). Rather, participating leaders embrace the role expansion one confers on the other. One of my study's most significant findings is that resistance to discourses of intensive mothering allows mothers both their selfhood and power (O'Reilly, 2020; Rich, 2021).

Leaders who explicitly state how becoming a mother increases their confidence come from families where their own mother worked full time and mostly as teachers themselves. The cultural location of the mother influences women's resistance to patriarchal motherhood (O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020). Although leaders do not

specifically discuss their relationships with their mothers, by working as full-time professionals, their mothers' mothering is dissonant to the patriarchal discourse of mothering, demonstrating to their daughters a more complex model of motherhood (Smith Silva, 2020). As Rich (2021) argues, mothers empower their daughters by reclaiming their empowerment: "The most important thing one woman can do is to illuminate and expand her daughter's sense of actual possibilities" (p. 204). My findings strengthen this claim.

Reflections on Women's Leadership Careers Prior to Headship

Leaders construct their career journeys within a women's educational leadership discourse by conforming with perceived ways of women advancing their leadership careers through taking advantage of rather than seeking out developmental opportunities to advance their careers (Coleman, 2002; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a; Torrence, et al., 2017). Leaders progress through a similar pattern of leadership experiences and report limited ambitions for headship at the beginning of their careers. However, expressing limited ambition towards an end goal does not imply a lack of self-efficacy. Rather, women appear to be reframing career ambition as a state, prioritising role satisfaction and a healthy work-life balance rather than an end goal. A reframing of ambition in this way suggests a new conceptual framework is required in the field of educational leadership to capture and explain women's careers accurately. Emerging research on Millennials suggests such a framework would also support the new generation of men and women school leaders, who appear to conform less to essentialist gender discourse and prioritise well-being and family (Edge, 2014; Edge et al., 2022; Porter & Fahrenwald, 2022). Equally, the Millennial

women in the cohort achieved headship at a younger age than other leaders in the sample, possibly suggesting a weakening of the influence of essentialist views on gender.

The continued relational nature of women's careers (Bimrose et al., 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017) and women's altruistic interests in leadership (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Torrence et al., 2017) suggests that women continue to incorporate normative essentialist gender expectations, which position men rather than women as leaders. Incorporating essentialist gender expectations reduces women's power and agency in their work lives by acting on their self-efficacy to apply for headship. My findings highlight the importance of mentoring to develop leadership knowledge and make visible the rewards of leadership, in turn empowering women to act on their self-efficacy. Headteacher mentoring played a crucial role in participating leaders' careers. However, the ad hoc nature of mentoring available to leaders before headship foregrounds the need for a systemic national mentoring programme to accelerate women's leadership careers.

My findings strengthen the evidence that women's careers continue to be influenced by their family life (Coleman, 2011; Guihen, 2018; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). The limiting aspects of the lived experience of patriarchal motherhood are still evident in many leaders' adherence to the concept of maternal sacrifice, which disrupts women's careers. School cultures that continue to intensify the sacrifices for working mothers reinforce expectations that school leadership is incompatible with motherhood, especially when mothering young children (Smith, 2016; Torrence et al., 2017). However, a few participating women, on becoming mothers, achieve an experience of

maternal empowerment (O'Reilly, 2020), which confers on them the agency to apply for headship. The social location of women who successfully resist the dominant discourse of motherhood is an important area for future study.

A salient finding of my research in explaining leaders' career trajectories is the role women's partners play. All leaders foreground their emotional and practical support in the home as essential in enabling their careers. This finding is the most significant deviation from previous research (Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2009; Mckillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011b). Men's gender performativity, which rejects essentialist binaries, enables greater equity for both parents by enabling men to build stronger relationships with their children and providing women more time and energy to concentrate on their careers.

Section 2: Mothering and the Enactment of School Leadership

Intensive mothering appears to dominate European and American parenting cultures (Hays, 1996; Rich, 2021). The oppressive nature of intensive mothering discourses on women is well documented (Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2020; Rich, 2021). My findings on how leaders resist and incorporate dominant gender discourses on motherhood are situated within the research on motherhood and educational leadership and reflected upon to answer the second subsidiary research question, which focuses on the intersection of leaders performativity of motherhood and the enactment of school leadership: 1. What are the perceived opportunities and challenges of secondary headship for women? 2. What opportunities and challenges does motherhood present for secondary headship? A poststructuralist lens is employed, enabling analysis to

move away from categorising leadership and personal qualities as feminine or masculine. The analysis focuses on how leadership and motherhood enrich and present challenges for the other, rather than searching for a women's leadership style, which risks essentialism (Fuller, 2014; Showunmi, 2018; 2022). The first part focuses on the resistance and incorporation of intensive mothering discourse, specifically exploring how the rewards of headship enrich mothering and minimise maternal guilt. The second part focuses on the enactment of leadership, firstly exploring how mothering can augment the enactment of leadership, from constructing a school vision to strengthening relationships with staff, parents and students. Finally, the section examines the challenges leadership presents for mothering, specifically the consuming nature of headship.

Intensive Mothering: Resistance and Incorporation

Headteachers and executive headteachers have resisted the regulatory mechanism of intensive mothering to leave paid employment or step down from promotion to devote more time and energy to their children (Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2020). Through leading their schools whilst also mothering, they have achieved an experience of mothering that O'Reilly (2020) describes as empowering. However, the continued resonance of intensive mothering discourses is evident in leaders' discursive struggles with maternal guilt. A salient finding is how the rewards of leadership enrich leaders mothering to help them resist the dominant discourses of intensive mothering.

Maternal Guilt

Most leaders report experiencing guilt related to their children, revealing an assumption that working full time whilst a mother naturally will incur guilt (O'Reilly, 2020; Vernier et al., 2022). Maternal guilt is an embedded discourse of intensive mothering and is one of the most robust research findings on motherhood. Maternal guilt is caused by the dilemmas of meeting the requirements of intensive mothering, especially when negotiating the responsibilities of paid employment (O'Reilly, 2020; Vernier et al., 2022). Karen's statement, "You always have that mother guilt", reflects the resilience of the intensive mothering discourse through her acceptance of maternal guilt as a natural state. Her words suggest at least a recognition of, if not complete, incorporation of the principles of intensive mothering. The primary source of maternal guilt leaders identify is time spent away from their children, suggesting little change since the emergence of intensive mothering discourse in the 90s (Hays, 1996). As Jill comments, "I think you cannot help but feel guilty. And things that you might miss out on as well." Most leaders admit that the constancy of their work means they can feel they are not doing enough for their children, reflecting the pressure to be ever present in children's lives (Bianchi et al., 2012). Jane articulates:

> Being an executive headteacher impacts family life, and being mentally present when you have a position of responsibility can be quite hard; even when you are physically at home with your family, it can be difficult to switch off and not have your thinking processes plagued by problems. (Jane)

Leaders with toddlers feel this source of guilt more keenly, showing the resilience of intensive mothering discourses that dictate women rather than men should stay at home or work part-time of preschool age children (Aarntzen et al., 2019; Borelli et al., 2017; Taylor & Scott, 2018). Also, time pressure on mothering is particularly strong when children are under three (Hamplova, 2019). As Lisa's comment reveals, "I was

always convinced that the mums who did not work were saying look at her turning up at the last minute looking flustered again." There is a 'guilt gap' whereby mothers, as opposed to fathers, spend more time worrying about children, reflecting women's incorporation of intensive mothering discourses (Vernier et al., 2022). Isabel, when describing the tension between her maternal feelings and the decision to go to work, does not refer to the child's father, what the child may say to him, or his feelings regarding his contribution to childcare: "Every so often, my son says I do not want you to go to work. I miss you listening to me, mummy, and that makes me feel guilty."

However, in contrast to the literature on maternal guilt, which associates maternal guilt with lower maternal well-being and anxiety (Aarntzen et al., 2019), many leaders in this study express high levels of maternal well-being and low stress levels. Also, the language these leaders use when discussing guilt reflects discursively a pushing back against the standards of intensive mothering (O'Reilly, 2020) and finding ways to minimise the guilt (Christopher 2012; Gerson 2010; Miller 2007). Karen demonstrates, "You always have mother guilt. It is just how you manage it. And some days, you manage it better than others." Although suggesting that mother guilt is inevitable, as aforementioned, Karen downplays the importance of mother guilt and allows for self-efficacy in determining the power mother guilt exerts. Following the comment above, Isabel talks about how she must, in this way, "wrestle with the duality of the roles." Her use of the term "wrestle" implies challenging rather than allowing the guilt to regulate her selfhood. Like the mothers in Collin's (2021) study, even though leaders accept guilt is inevitable whilst a mother and working full time, they assert agency over their emotional well-being by suggesting that they have the power to diminish the influence

of mother guilt. This tactic does not eliminate guilt entirely but makes it less painful (Collins, 2021) and crucially less influential on their well-being.

The agency and power participating women demonstrate to diminish the influence of mother guilt suggests that maybe women leaders are currently more effectively challenging the dominant essentialist gender discourse than twenty years ago (Coleman, 2002). Coleman (2002) reported that women headteachers were preoccupied with the guilt engendered by their role conflict as mothers and career women. In contrast, the women in my study are not consumed by guilt. Perhaps most strikingly, few leaders reach a point where they no longer feel guilt; Jill explains, "I let guilt go a long time ago because I just think it is not healthy and nobody has the right to tell you what to do." Like the four headteachers in Smith's (2016) research, leaders are positive about their choice to work rather than stay home with children. Leaders reflect on social actions, shaping their lives and careers, enabling them to resist the oppressive influences of mother guilt.

Rewards of School Leadership

The rewards of headship personally and for their families are important in minimising maternal guilt and empowering leaders to manage challenging workloads with family life's complexity. Leaders' optimism for headship is crucial in sustaining their well-being. Jill shares, "I choose to do a job that I really enjoy, which eases dealing with all the day-to-day frustrations you get. If I can summarise the impact that I can have, it is phenomenal." Leaders describe the role in enthusiastically positive terms, talking about the "privilege", "massive rewards", and "honour" of being a headteacher.

Research suggests most headteachers believe headship is the best job in education (Earley & Greany, 2022; Jackson & Berkley, 2020). Working in a high-deprivation area, Isabel articulates, "I feel headship is a privilege even on days I found it hard. It is such an opportunity to be able to shape something." The rewards of positively influencing children's lives are an important factor in motivating and sustaining leaders, especially whilst managing the demands of mothering. For all leaders, the power to positively influence the community the school serves is the crucial factor that motivates their headship and makes leading whilst mothering meaningful. Mel articulates, "It is a huge privilege to serve the kind of community that we serve up here, getting to know and understand children and their families. I am really inspired by that every day." Although the consistent focus of school leadership literature is the importance of headteachers (Day et al., 2009; Leithwood, 2019), there is very little recent research on what rewards, sustains and motivates headteachers (Morgan & Sugrue, 2008). The challenges of recruiting headteachers underline the importance of more research in this area.

Equally important to many leaders participating is the affirmation leadership brings for their self-worth and identity, strengthening their mothering. As advocates of gender equality, leaders place a high value on their careers, which they view as an integral part of their identity. Anna asserts, "Work is part of who you are and your identity." Similar to four of the five headteachers in Smith's (2016) research, headteachers are clear about the appropriateness of their decision to work while mothering young children. Self-determination characterises their narratives, and there is a sense that leaders engage reflectively with essentialist gender discourse and take action to shape their own lives and careers. For example, one leader aware of the dilemmas of

combining leadership and motherhood identifies what she wants rather than being over-influenced by socially determined expectations:

> I like my work. I work hard. I find it very gratifying. Although I enjoyed my last few weeks of maternity, being able to take the children to and from school, I know if that were my normal, it would drive me bonkers.

Finally, most leaders value the power a headteacher has to affect their working patterns. Confirming higher-status jobs may be more important to mothers' well-being because of the flexibility and opportunities to control, own and harmonise their family and work responsibilities (Hamplova, 2019). As Gemma articulates:

> The higher up you are, the easier it is when you have children because you are more in charge of your own time. You are more in control of your own boundaries and workload. It is actually easier to be a headteacher and a mother than to be any other senior leader. (Gemma)

Most leaders believe their leadership role enriches their mothering and brings value to their families. As aforementioned, leaders are not immune to maternal guilt by their own admission, but they believe that the benefits to their families outweigh the costs. All leaders strongly advocate for gender equality, which is an additional motivating factor. Being a role model, which enables their own children to deconstruct gender stereotypes in wider society, is important to them. Susan articulates, "I have been a good role model to my children, particularly the boys, in terms that women are independent people." Those leaders who are mothers of daughters are deeply motivated to challenge essentialist gender expectations of men and women. Chloe articulates, "I felt quite strongly about being a role model to my girls, that it was perfectly normal for me to go out to work and being the one getting promoted and for dad to be at home with them." By mobilising such arguments, leaders are positioning their careers as fostering gender equality and ensuring a psychological balance and

well-being, ultimately leading to them being better mothers. In this way, leaders resist intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) and reframe motherhood as a site of empowerment (O'Reilly, 2020). The patriarchal model of motherhood defines mothering as a private and non-political activity, whereas empowered mothering sees it as a socially engaged endeavour and a site of power for women to affect social change (O'Reilly, 2020).

Finally, the financial benefits of being a headteacher are equally important in diminishing maternal guilt. Deborah articulates, "We can go on nice holidays and all of those things. In this way, the salary can go some way to mitigating the mother guilt." Although Deborah admits to mother guilt, she is resisting its influence. The financial compensation can provide for children's material needs. For the women who are single parents in the cohort, this is especially important:

> I suppose in the early years, promotion was about being able to afford things for the children rather than improving things for me. I was in a different position because it was just me, and therefore, I did not think about stepping down because I could not.

Most leaders are in a dual-income family, and the majority are the family's breadwinners. Women, as the breadwinner, are seen to transgress social norms, which position men as the breadwinner and reflect a growing trend in England towards dual earner households and increasing stability of women's employment once they have children (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). The financial rewards of a leadership role assist women's resistance to intensive mothering. Financial independence enhances a woman's selfhood outside of motherhood and affords her power in the home. Susan articulates, "I am really pleased that I am not dependent on anybody else – my life is my own – I do not have to make decisions on the basis that I have no

money." The personal rewards participating leaders gain from headship, emotional and financial, enable them to resist patriarchal motherhood to achieve an identity and experience of maternal empowerment, which in turn improves the lives of their families (O'Reilly, 2020).

Mothering: Strengthening the Enactment of School Leadership

Head and executive headteachers reject managerialism and draw upon their mothering to strengthen their approach to and enactment of leadership. Leaders construct a school vision underpinned by the principles of social justice and develop a learning-centred leadership approach. Framing their leadership within the feminist construction of educational leadership (Blackmore, 1989), leaders define the exercise of power as working with and empowering people rather than controlling people. Leadership continues to present challenges, especially for those leading in schools rated Inadequate or Requires Improvement and in their first year. The pervasiveness of essentialist gender discourse on leadership is evident in many leaders' experiences of prejudice as a head or executive headteacher.

Constructing a School Vision

When articulating the opportunities of headship, leaders' narratives reflect the strong sense of moral purpose, which underpins their school vision. Their vision is framed by the principles of relational leadership, leadership for learning and leading for social justice (Earley, 2022; Fuller, 2014; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). One of the most

important aspects of leaders' vision is creating the structures and conditions that accelerate social mobility by placing at the heart high-quality learning and connection with the local community, as Deborah articulates:

> That opportunity is for us, particularly in my school and our area, to change their lives and show them there are people who care and look after them, is massively important. Enabling social mobility for a lot of our students and providing a chance that they would never have had motivates me. (Deborah)

Secondly, an equally important part of their vision is enabling all staff to flourish. Ellie's vision of leadership puts staff development at its centre:

> The opportunities are massive, and there are massive rewards, such as growing people into leadership positions and seeing them be better than they thought and helping them to develop and train the next generation of leaders. Just to give people opportunities and see them take and grab them. (Ellie)

In constructing a learning-centred vision, leaders draw upon their experiences working in schools where organisational structures nullified women's ambitions or disrupted their career journeys (Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022). As Karen articulates:

> The opportunities to create a culture for your staff where they know they are trusted and valued. Learning from your career the things that you disagreed with, where you have thought, "Right. When I am a headteacher, I am going to make sure that staff are trusted to teach." (Karen)

Women construct their leadership drawing upon the theoretical model of learning-centred leadership, which has gained primacy in the last ten years over other models defined within a neoliberal discourse (Earley, 2022; Woods et al., 2018; Woods & Macfarlane, 2022). Recent educational leadership research recognises that a 'great' school has a clear vision that is values-based and articulates a strong moral purpose,

puts high-quality student learning and continuous staff development at the heart, and prioritises positive relationships with parents and carers (Woods & Macfarlane, 2022). In describing their vision in these terms based on concepts of care and empowerment, leaders reject neoliberal constructions of leadership, which emphasise outcomes, rationality, and hierarchical power structures (Oppenhaim-Shachar, 2022).

Leaders define their vision in terms of leadership for social justice and learning in line with previous research on 'women's ways' of leading (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Also, women leaders articulating a vision based on the concept of care have been interpreted as incorporating cultural and historical assumptions of nurture and care attached to the gendered discourse of motherhood (Lumby & Azaola, 2011). However, care in this way, viewed as a feminised attribute rather than as a relational attribute, limits men from enacting care as part of their professionalism and, at the same time, casts women as nurturers and supporters rather than as leaders (Smith, 2016). Not categorising leadership qualities as masculine or feminine and engaging in poststructuralist discourse allows men and women to enact leadership in a way that challenges managerialism. Current theoretical leadership models adopt this perspective, proposing that a great twenty-first-century English school prioritises relational leading, moral purpose and learning-centre leadership (Earley, 2022; Woods & Macfarlane, 2022). Analysis focusing on whether leadership styles reflect a 'women's way' of leading also risks reinforcing essentialism (Fuller, 2014; Showunmi, 2018; 2022).

My findings on how leaders' experiences of balancing career and parental responsibilities inform a vision to establish family-friendly staff cultures by minimising conflict between family and work make an important contribution to the evidence base

on retention of school leaders. Previously, little attention has been given to creating conditions in schools that prioritise work-life balance, despite work-life balance emerging in the last five years as one of the principal reasons for the downward spiral in teachers' and leaders' morale (NEU, 2018; Zuccollo, 2019; Bingham, 2022). The experience of mothering motivates leaders to prioritise this crucial aspect of leading schools:

> I am more empathetic. You realise how important it is to other teachers to have a proper work-life balance. You need to give teachers the space and the time. Teaching as a profession has become so absorbing, and the narrative around workload and stress is worrying, not just for people who are parents. (Jill)

Mel concurs, emphasising how enabling staff to establish a healthy work-life balance is at the heart of the vision for her school:

> One of the things I love about being headteacher is we can create different ways of working. We are still very much a work in progress, but I believe for us to become a truly outstanding school, we have to be a sustainable school. I, as well as the staff, have a work-life balance that makes us happy, that makes us want to come in and be happy at school. (Mel)

At the heart of her vision is the focus on care for her staff and their happiness. Staff well-being and development are central to leaders' definitions of their leadership. Leaders construct a school vision within an educational leadership discourse in which an ethic of care for students and staff sits at the heart (Earley, 2022; Woods et al., 2018; Woods & Macfarlane, 2022). Crucially, the experience of mothering expands women's vision to incorporate a focus on work-life balance and well-being as an essential aspect of caring for staff.

Learning-Centred Leadership

Headteachers and executive headteachers participating frame their leadership within the construct of transformational and relational theory, which has significantly changed the discourse and practice of school leadership in England over the last ten years (Day et al., 2009; Earley, 2022; Leithwood, 2019). When they reflect upon their practice, leaders prioritise creating school conditions where staff can flourish. Educational leadership research identifies a key feature of school cultures in which staff thrive is the empowerment of followers and transforming schools through distributed rather than autocratic leadership approaches (Day et al., 2009; Earley, 2022; Leithwood, 2019). Karen's adoption of the term "we" in her description below of the school climate where she leads shows a rejection of hierarchical conceptions of leadership and prioritisation of an inclusive, distributed model of leadership (Harris, 2008; Harris & DeFlammis, 2016):

> We are creating a climate in our school at the moment where there is this real sense of professional trust. Performance management and an appraisal system are stripped back to where it is based on teachers teaching, loving teaching, and students being inspired by teachers who are at the top of their game. (Karen)

All leaders, like Karen, prioritise creating supportive environments, which prioritise staff development (Earley, 2022; Harris & DeFlammis, 2016).

The emergence of relational and transformational leadership theory has caused a growing interest in the relationship between gender and transformational leadership (Muzvidziwa, 2022) because transformational leadership appears to fit well with an essentialist gender discourse (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Muzvidziwa, 2022). Although leaders demonstrate a preference for an enactment of leadership that prioritises relational engagement, their discourse suggests that it is due to differing

priorities, informed by mothering, rather than women leading differently to men (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022; Torrence et al., 2017). Men and women headteachers enact transformational leadership (Day et al., 2009; Earley, 2022; Leithwood, 2019; Torrence et al., 2017). The significance of these findings is how women headteachers are challenging the normative discourse on the incompatibility of headship and motherhood to reframe motherhood as a site of agency to empower and shape their leadership of schools.

Building Stronger Staff, Parental and Student Relationships

An important contribution to the literature on motherhood are my findings on leaders' enactment of leadership, which demonstrates the positive influence of motherhood on women's work performance (Ma et al., 2022). Previous research on maternity and motherhood across disciplines emphasises the negative influence, highlighting the restrictions the discourses of intensive mothering place on women (O'Reilly, 2020). Leaders draw on mothering experiences to deepen their understanding of others and their own 'situatedness'. Drawing upon Bourdieu's (2005) notion of habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" (p. 72) allows an analysis of leaders' dispositions in terms of personal values developed from their engagement with discourse from the social field of family. Acknowledging their 'situatedness' enables leaders to develop and sustain ongoing dialogue with parents, students and staff to build relationships, break down boundaries and build community (Fuller, 2013).

Strengthening Staff Relationships. For most leaders, mothering positively influences their performance of leadership by deepening their knowledge of their own

and other's 'situatedness', opening them up to the meaning of another, as Karen shares:

> For me, it did make a difference having children. Without children, I was on a path where I thought I understood people with children but did not as a leader and manager. Getting married and having children changed my leadership style unimaginably. In a good way. (Karen)

Headteachers acknowledge their own 'situatedness', creating an ongoing dialogue, building connections with and getting the best out of staff. Enacting leadership framed within relational leadership discourse ongoing dialogue is important to facilitate "the work of others who share the power and authority to collaboratively craft direction" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 10). Fran shares:

> It is really nice that you can say to staff, "I know what it feels like to be 32 and having your first child or your second one and feel like you are going under." It helps to have that sort of empathy with where they are is important because they work so hard those people. (Fran)

Sharing stories about their children is an important part of this ongoing dialogue to break down boundaries and develop collegiality amongst staff. Mel shares, "Training staff and talking to staff about the challenges or experiences I have with my own teenage son makes me much more real. I think it is a benefit." Ongoing dialogue strengthens their relationships with staff, consolidating their approach to leadership.

Furthermore, headteachers, by role modelling a work-life balance, create opportunities for conversations, which build stronger connections with staff and better support staff work-life balance, as Karen explains:

> Sometimes, staff seeing you leave early and talking about your children and how you have been up for three hours in the night because one of them vomited

> makes other members of staff feel confident to say the same. It has made me far more aware. (Karen)

Women value offering a powerful and positive model of an aspect of gender that is widely seen as limiting (Torrence et al., 2017), which empowers especially women teachers and strengthens a more equitable school culture (Lumby and Azaola, 2011). Jane articulates, "I had a one and a two-year-old when I started headship. People were pleased that somebody was prepared to be that role model for other people – that it is possible."

Mothering not only strengthens women's relationships with staff enabling them to build collegiality with staff, but crucially focuses their leadership on prioritising work-life balance and staff well-being. Staff well-being has become increasingly important as the English education system adopts a high accountability agenda and the Covid-19 pandemic has increased pressure on schools (Bingham & Bubb, 2022). Leading schools in a way that considers staff well-being and helps staff establish an appropriate work-life balance are important in the retention of staff (NEU, 2018; Zuccollo, 2019; Bingham & Bubb, 2022), and recognised as a key leadership responsibility (Bingham & Bubb, 2022). The literature on teacher well-being and workload highlights the importance of leaders defining and sustaining positive school cultures, teacher autonomy, effective organisation of change, and opportunities for professional growth (Bingham & Bubb, 2022). Interestingly, the educational literature does not mention the importance of enabling teachers and leaders to manage their family lives. Women's negative experiences as middle or senior leaders managing work and family life highlight how organisational cultures can intensify sacrifices mothers must make teaching and leading in schools, reducing their well-being.

Establishing Family-Friendly Schools. A salient finding is the organisational structures that promote family-friendly schools. Most leaders implement policies to accommodate family commitments, whether childcare, caring for elderly parents or attending a child's nativity play or sports competition. Mothering informs women's management, allowing them to adjust policy and practice to meet the demands of staff's work-life balance. Negative experiences of working in school cultures that refused to accommodate family responsibilities strengthened women's resolve to lead differently (Moorosi et al., 2018). Anna articulates, "I was working for a headteacher who would not let you have the time with your family, and that was one of the things that I was really keen I would not replicate."

Furthermore, leaders try accommodating flexible work, mobile working, and compressed hours requests (McNeill Adams & Janta, 2018). Isabel suggests, "I try as much as I can to support part-time and flexible working requests. I try to support when people have medical appointments and make those things as easy as possible within the boundaries of practice." Finally, leaders draw on their insight into managing motherhood and their careers to create time, space and advice for their teachers to establish a sustainable work-life balance. Ellie articulates, "I would hope that I help people to teach and lead and manage family circumstances– including caring for family members." Women's experiences of prejudice and navigating mothering whilst leading may explain why women are more likely to challenge workplace policies around work-life balance, benefitting men and women (Mckinsey & Company, 2018; Torrence et al., 2017).

My findings strengthen the limited educational research (Bradbury & Gunter, 2006; Fuller, 2013; Lumby & Azaola, 2011) that presents the positive influence of motherhood on headship by enhancing the woman's status (Bradbury & Gunter, 2006) and enabling the development of leadership skills and empathy (Lumby & Azaola, 2011). Leaders' dialogue with staff demonstrates how mothering positively develops their (head) teacherly habitus (Fuller, 2013) regarding their thoughts and feelings about leading in education and how they make choices about performing gendered leadership.

Strengthening Parental Relationships. Leaders' mothering develops their (head) teacherly habitus (Fuller, 2013), which participants acknowledge, to sustain an ongoing dialogue with parents about understanding and building community. Susan articulates, "Being a parent gives you a realism. It is quite good to know what it is like to be a parent of a child who goes through school. It gives you an understanding of the parent's perspective." Susan indicates how her mothering enables her to be more open to the meanings of parents to build connections.

Furthermore, leaders acknowledge how their own 'situatedness' as a mother changes the power in the relationship with parents, enabling them to create a dialogue to break down boundaries. Gemma states, "I definitely feel that you are less of a threat. I never realised that I was a threat before, but I definitely picked up on that sort of softening of people. Before, people found me threatening." Leaders acknowledge that sharing the same status with parents on this common level diffuses conflict. As Chloe explains:

I use my status as a parent often. If I have an irate parent complaining or upset parent, my opening line is usually, "I am a mum too, and I do understand how you are feeling". I find that instantly defuses an awful lot of conversations.

Confirming how headteachers' mothering positively develops their values impacts conflict resolution daily (Fuller, 2013). Mothering deepens leaders' understanding of parents and their own 'situatedness', positively developing their (head) teacherly habitus (Fuller, 2013) positioning mothering as a site of empowerment (Rich, 2021).

Strengthening Student Relationships*.* In the same way, leaders' mothering develops their (head) teacher habitus (Fuller, 2013), informing a dialogue with students about understanding. Drawing upon the knowledge of their children and experiences, their empathy with their students increases, which in turn changes their leadership approach. For example, Fran describes how watching her son choose his subjects for GSCE increases her insight and enables her to adapt the process for the students in her school. However, though leaders describe how their mothering increases their empathy with their students, they do not use practical skills acquired through mothering to address the social difficulties in their local contexts (Lumby and Azaola, 2011). None of the leaders discusses offering emotional involvement or practical help such as food and clothes, a reminder of the context-contingent nature of motherhood (O'Brien Hallstein, et al., 2020). In South Africa, where the physical care of children is seen as much more of a community affair, this strongly influences the performance of leadership, where principals extend their practical support of students beyond the school (Lumby & Azaola, 2011).

Leadership: Challenges for Mothering

My findings confirm that headship's demanding and time-consuming nature are the principal challenges for mothering (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). The principles of neoliberalism, with its hallmark of high stakes testing and public accountability, have significantly increased the level of accountability on a headteacher in English secondary schools (Ball, 1994; Starr, 2021), which in turn has increased the workload of headteachers (Dunning & Elliot, 2019; Greany & Earley, 2022). In accord with Torrence et al. (2017) and Smith (2011a), my findings confirm Coleman's findings from 20 years ago (2002) that the heavy workload of headship remains the most pressing challenge of headship for women. My findings demonstrate that pressures of accountability and workload are felt more keenly in schools in Ofsted category of RI or Inadaqute and the first year of headship. Finally, the experiences of many leaders confirm that masculinist cultures still exist in schools, contributing to the prejudice that women encounter (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022). However, when reflecting on their experiences of prejudice, these leaders do not reveal a loss of faith in their power to lead.

High Levels of Accountability and Responsibility

Most leaders confirm that the high levels of accountability incumbent on a headteacher are the principal challenge to their well-being and, in turn, their mothering. Deborah states, "The burden of responsibility on my shoulders is a lot, which has been one of the biggest challenges." The level of responsibility can mean that the role becomes

all-consuming, and many participating headteachers discuss how the constancy of the work takes them mentally away from their families:

> And that sense of carrying the load affects your personal life because you are trying to work out the box you can put it in, in your head. Then you are trying to work out if you can shut the lid of that box, but that is quite difficult. (Fran)

Leaders' experiences of the level of responsibility associated with headship accords with educational research, which discusses how accountability measures have increased pressure on schools and school leaders to perform, in turn increasing headteacher workload (Greany & Earley, 2022). These pressures are exasperated in schools that are in an Ofsted category of Inadequate or RI. The headteachers whose narratives reveal the most anxiety, stress and reduced levels of maternal well-being work in schools in Ofsted category RI or Inadequate; they report the pressure to improve the school negatively impacts their work-life balance. In accord with Wang et al. (2022), for headteachers working in these schools, there appears to be an intensification of work. A key component of the intensification is the time and pacing of events more often has control over them rather than the headteacher being in control of their own time (Wang et al., 2022). The pressures mean working in difficult working conditions and emotionally draining work:

> When I started my previous job, the school was in such a state, and my life was all about trying to improve everything in the school. All my emails came in on my phone. I ended up picking things up at all hours. I ran the school's Twitter account and all the priorities –I never switched off. (Anna)

However, when a school has improved and is on a more stable footing, leaders' control over their time and work improves, and they achieve a better work-life balance:

> My work-life balance this year is significantly better than two years ago when the school was in Special Measures. There is that time in a school's

> improvement journey when you have to be on-site for long hours to get the work done. (Mel)

Also, the pressures of the role are felt more keenly in the first year of headship; the professional demands of headship at this stage in leaders' careers place considerable pressure on their work-life balance, which induces high stress levels. Many leaders highlight how the all-consuming nature of the headship in the first year pushes them to work long hours and leaves them emotionally drained:

> That first year of headship was tough, and nobody can quite explain that to you because all I did was work all the time. And even when I was not working, I was thinking about working, which is still true to an extent, but I have got better at compartmentalising work. (Fran)

Similar to the headteachers in McKillop and Moorosi (2017), the reality of headship in their first year seems to have shocked many of the leaders. However, there is no evidence that this is due to a lack of confidence. The challenge appears managing the demands of the role. As Fran recounts above, leaders in their third, fourth, and even second year of headship appear to become more accustomed to the role and find solutions to managing the emotional demands. My findings, like those in McKillop and Moorosi's (2017) study, suggest further preparation for headship is required to reduce the stress of the first year and increase the likelihood of headteachers staying in post. Bush (2018) highlights how England's decentralised system, which offers optional national qualifications offered by different providers, alongside university master programmes and academy chain leadership programmes, may leave current and future headteachers unprepared (Bush, 2018). Leaders reflect this fragmented system of leadership preparation: four leaders have completed the NPQH, three obtained a

university MA, and eight have no additional qualification beyond their post-graduate teaching certificate in education. The experiences of most leaders concur that more attention is required to develop more standardised and specialised leadership preparation. A lack of systemic preparation and induction can delay a headteacher's effectiveness and increase a sense of isolation (Bush, 2018). The anxiety and stress headteachers report in their first year reflect weaknesses in England's current ad hoc approach to headteacher preparation (Bush, 2018).

An Extreme Work Model. The demands of the role mean that most leaders work in excess of 60 hours a week. These working hours concur with the average term working week of an English headteacher according to the most recent surveys conducted by the DfE and the NAHT (Walker, et al., 2019) and educational leadership research (Wang et al., 2022). A 60-hour week qualifies as an extreme work model (Hewlett & Luce, 2006). Hewlett & Luce (2006) highlight how an extreme work model poses significant challenges especially to mothers, as intensive mothering exists in tension due to long waged hours competing with childcare responsibilities (Hewlett & Luce, 2006; ONS, 2021). Recent educational research also highlights how not only do headteachers have to work longer hours but have to engage in more of the same work tasks and take on new responsibilities with fewer resources, which is leading to work intensification that is negatively influencing their personal lives (Wang et al., 2022). However, despite the long working hours, most leaders report contentment with their current work-life balance. Lisa articulates, "Work-life balance is enormously important without a question of a doubt. You are talking to someone who is full of gratitude at the moment. I have not been happier professionally in a long time." The concept of a sustainable work-life balance is highly subjective. However, overall, leaders state how

they can usually balance elements of their work and family life, which they feel most contribute to their quality of life and find ways to address the challenge of concurrent responsibilities productively.

Prejudice and Discrimination

A challenge of headship, highlighted by many leaders' is the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes, as communicated by parents, governors and staff, and the link between gender and work roles being especially entrenched (Coleman, 2022). Women continue to be positioned as weak (Fitzgerald, 2013) and judged according to their appearance. Olivia explains, "I will get those misogynistic male parents who assume simply by being female I must be a piece of fluff who cannot do the job, and those comments will be around appearance." Comments leaders receive, such as "you are not just a pretty face", highlights entrenched gender stereotypes about women's capabilities and the importance of women's appearance to their professional career.

However, leaders are keen to point out that their experience of such discriminatory attitudes often comes from older men. Age, education and income strongly correlate with views of gender roles (Taylor & Scott, 2018). Lisa explains, "Fitting onto the senior team, you realise the people you have to impress are often men of a certain age." A few leaders talk about governors, men often retired from full-time work, or senior team members near retirement, treating them dismissively. Jill recognises how male governors treat her differently from men leaders because she is a woman.

Furthermore, many leaders continue to encounter masculinist cultures, which continue to position men as leaders and women as 'outsiders', the unexpected occupant of leadership roles. Fran highlights, "There are six headteachers, and I am the only female one of them. I think marginalised is too strong a word for it, but it certainly does not feel like you are necessarily on an equal footing." Similar to Fran, many of the leaders feel exposed as women headteachers or executive headteachers, which influences their acts of leadership, as Jane explains:

> I look around and see our networks or headteacher meetings and feel a bit out of place. I do not fit the mould. And that affects some people's perceptions of me, my decision making, and how I choose to do things. (Jane)

Lisa articulates how women need to continue to come to terms as leaders with the dichotomy of managing the qualities that they value and the requirement to present qualities that are expected of a school leader:

> I have spoken about my emotional intelligence, understanding myself and bringing the best out of people, but if you talk about that too much, those people think you do not have much spine. What I learned is that I needed to project more of that steeliness, which is there as well, which is not the side I would necessarily empathise with and bring to the forefront to impress those types of people. (Lisa)

These findings confirm the literature that states women leaders find it necessary to alter or shift their behaviours and identities to conform to expectations due to their 'outsider' status (Coleman, 2022; Fuller, 2013). Women need to be careful performing acts of leadership, which are seen as typically male, as they are likely still to draw criticisms for transgressing the boundaries of being a woman and mother:

> I got accused of being a ballbreaker once because I told somebody that what they were doing was not right. You move from being a weak, kind person, a

walkover, to a ballbreaker. And probably men who give the same messages are listened to more. (Anna)

Stepping outside the acceptable, socially constructed, nurturing role, women continue to risk being negatively judged (Collins, 2021; Carli & Eagly, 1999; Krefting, 2003). Coleman (2022) argues women's 'outsider' status and the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes may mean women continue to shift their leadership actions and develop more complex identities to be accepted as a leader.

Many leaders describe how their commitment to work and capacity to be effective leaders is questioned when they become mothers. Susan articulates, "I remember people saying I did not know you were a parent. I do think people see you differently as a parent, and they think because I do my job properly, I cannot be a parent." Jane experiences similar discriminatory assumptions about her leadership, explaining how parents attribute a drop in school standards to her mothering young children. These findings accord with the research which proposes despite positive cultural changes towards gender equality in schools, a masculinist work culture appears to continue to encourage discrimination, if indirect, which often incorporates unconscious gender stereotypes associated with motherhood (Coleman, 2022). A 'masculinist' work culture questions women's capacity to lead and a mother's commitment to their career (Coleman, 2022; Collins, 2021).

Reflections on the Mothering and the Enactment of Leadership

This study challenges the oppressive nature of motherhood (Arendell, 2000; Bianchi et al., 2012; Collins, 2021; Rich, 2021) and normative discourse on the incompatibility

of headship and motherhood (Guihen, 2018; Smith, 2016) to reframe motherhood as a site of agency that empowers and shapes leaders' leadership of schools. These findings build upon the limited research that identifies the positive influences of mothering on school leadership (Bradbury & Gunter, 2006; Fuller, 2013; Lumby & Azaola, 2011). However, the findings strengthen the literature that women head and executive headteachers continue to experience prejudice (Coleman, 2022; Collins, 2021; Carli & Eagly, 1999; Fuller, 2013).

Motherhood acts as a site of agency informing leaders' vision and acts of leadership. Mothering informs a relational style of leadership (Earley, 2022), where an ethic of care for students and staff sits at the heart. Emboldened by mothering, leaders reject traditionally masculine constructs of leadership such as dominant, rational, hierarchical and outcome-orientated (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2022). My findings suggest instead, mothering motivates leaders to create school cultures where students and staff flourish and conflicts between family and work are minimised. Knowledge gained through mothering develops leaders' empathy with students, staff, and parents to improve the enactment of leadership. By deepening leaders' understanding of others and their own 'situatedness', mothering positively develops (head)teacherly habitus (Fuller, 2013) and positions mothering as a site of empowerment (Rich, 2021). Mothering is one influence that strengthens leaders' moral purpose to lead for social justice and improve social mobility. The women in this study assert that mothering develops knowledge and affective skills that advantage them as leaders. However, they do not position themselves as being better than men or women who, through choice or circumstance, are not mothers.

My findings suggest that the regulatory mechanism of intensive mothering is diminishing, and resistance to the discourse benefits maternal well-being and women's leadership careers. However, the continued resonance of the discourse is evident in leaders' internal discursive struggle with maternal guilt, confirming that maternal guilt remains one of the most consistent research findings on motherhood (O'Reilly, 2020; Vernier, et al., 2022). Leaders' main source of maternal guilt is the time spent away from their children, which is felt especially keenly when children are toddlers. However, crucially, maternal guilt is not influential enough to lower levels of maternal well-being; instead, women are positive about their choice to work, and the rewards of headship for them personally and their families serve powerfully to minimise the influence of maternal guilt. The power to positively influence the school community serves as the crucial factor in making leading whilst mothering meaningful.

Participating leaders perform constructs of gender but not in conformance with gendered norms, where women are perceived as subordinate, and motherhood is deemed to be deviant from the dominant discourse on leadership. The women emphasise the importance of their nurturing and rearing responsibilities whilst claiming determination, ambition, and confidence. By engaging reflexively with social influences, leaders reframe motherhood as a site of agency, changing the boundaries between personal and professional roles, importing the values and norms of mothering into their professional role and vice versa. A leadership role that can be deemed detrimental to mothering is depicted as a positive influence, affirming their self-worth and identity, which strengthens their mothering. Women in the study purposefully perform gender to subvert gendered norms and role modelling for their children to enable them to deconstruct gender stereotypes. The financial benefits of headship are

also important, as most are the 'breadwinner' of the family. By mobilising such arguments, leaders are positioning their careers as fostering gender equality and ensuring a psychological balance and well-being, ultimately leading to them being better mothers and reframing motherhood as a site of empowerment (O'Reilly, 2020).

Where there are no studies exclusively on women secondary school headteachers who are mothers, my findings strengthen research emerging recently in other sectors, which suggests that motherhood increases women's overall capacity (Ma et al., 2022) and, in a crucial way, positions leadership more positively to women and suggesting positive shifts in concept of gender and mothering.

Section 3: Reframing the Discourse of Leading and Mothering

The perceptions of the incompatibility of headship and motherhood are well documented (Coleman, 2011; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016). My findings on the support and strategies women employ to sustain their leadership and mothering are situated in this literature to address the subsidiary research question: What strategies do women headteachers employ to manage their work and home? The first part focuses on the professional support and strategies employed to effectively manage their headship, whilst the second part explores the support at home, which allows them the time and energy to mother and lead. A poststructuralist lens is employed to analyse how the performativity of mothering and fathering conforms to or transgresses dominant essentialist gender discourse to configure relationships in the home, which support women's leadership careers.

The Complexity of Leadership: Professional Support

Leaders' narratives confirm the complexity, isolation, and burden of headship (Craig, 2022; Earley & Greany, 2022). Headteachers highlight the importance of a trusted and aligned senior team within their schools to manage the complexity and burden of headship. Although valuing the part their senior teams play, they recognise that, ultimately, decisions rest with them and cannot always be made in consultation with the senior team. Therefore, most headteachers appreciate advice and collaboration with headteachers external to their schools or executive headteachers. External support also reduces the isolation of the role, especially when decisions cannot be shared internally with their leadership teams.

Senior Leadership Team

Headteachers emphasise the importance of establishing a reliable and aligned senior team, which they acknowledge as their most important professional support. An aligned senior team reduces the emotional and practical burden of work and implements leaders' leadership vision. Deborah emphasises:

> My senior team are aware that we are all working towards the same vision. We have all got the same values. That kind of support has been essential on a close collegial level. Having people you can trust, I suppose, is what I am saying. We are on the same wavelength and share the same vision. (Deborah)

By working closely with their senior team, headteachers resist the 'cult of leadership' that English governments have promoted and separate headteachers as a 'tribe' within the English education system (Craig, 2022). Headteachers emphasise the importance

of collegiality, trust and alignment in delivering the same vision, mitigating their separateness from their school colleagues to enable their collaborative, inclusive and distributed leadership style. In building a team around them that shares the same vision, headteachers reduce their work-related stress. How headteachers effectively build and distribute leadership effectively to manage the ever-increasing demands and complexities of the role is an under-researched area (Craig, 2022).

Co-Headship

A headteacher in a job share suggests that sharing leadership responsibilities is especially helpful in establishing sustainable working patterns, enabling her to lead whilst mothering; "my "co" in our co-headship is very supportive, kind and understanding about our life-work balance. Working with a co-headteacher is something that makes a difference." Earley and Greany (2022) confirm that the increasing intensity and complexity of headship necessitates the rethinking or restructuring of the headteacher role to facilitate job sharing, making it more attractive to aspiring leaders. The limited findings of this study show that co-headship can be used to make headship more appealing and ease succession planning, especially for women with young families who would like to progress to headship (Allen, 2008). Co-headship offers women and men a structure to manage the ever-increasing demands of the role whilst achieving a sustainable work-life balance (Earley and Greany, 2022).

However, there has been little research into co-headships since the NCSL study (Allan, 2008). At the time, only 30 schools nationwide had two full-time or two job-

sharing headteachers. Although the recent narrative supports the long-term sustainability of co-headship, it remains rare in secondary schools (Ayliffe & Stepney, 2022; DfE, 2019b; Mitchell & Turner, 2020). Academic research is necessary to provide an evidence base to clarify how co-headship works in practice and what school governors and MAT boards need to know to accept co-headship as an effective leadership model.

Multi-academy Trust (MAT) Leadership structures

Headteachers draw upon the leadership structures within a MAT to perform their leadership more effectively, especially appreciating their relationship with the executive headteacher in managing the responsibility of headship and providing advice. This confirms the findings of a recent Ambition Institute and Education Policy Institute report, highlighting MATs coaching programmes under an executive headteacher as the most valuable development available to senior leaders (Niblett & Andrews, 2019). MATs also, by establishing a ready-made network of headteachers, can reduce the isolation and vulnerability headteachers often feel leading in stand-alone academies and Local Authority schools (Craig, 2022). Mel explains how a close network of headteachers influences her leadership:

> We are a close group of secondary headteachers I work with in the Trust, and they have become my friends. They have influenced my thinking and have greatly supported me, especially as an early headteacher. I could just call on people. They have been my network of support. (Mel)

England has seen a rapid expansion of MATs in the last ten years (Greany & McGinity, 2022). Much of the research has focused on the MAT structure as the site and producer of system leadership most preferred through English policy (Cousin, 2019; Courtney & McGinity, 2022) or school improvement in MATs (Greany & McGinity, 2022). The challenges for CEOs to address the complexities of leading at scale, in some MATs, has led to a return to direct and toxic leadership, which has created cultures that intensify the challenges headteachers face (Craig, 2022). In contrast, less research has been conducted on how MATs support headteachers and promote leadership development (Bush, 2018). My findings suggest a MAT's potential to make the headteacher role appear more doable and attractive to those who wish to prioritise their families and leadership careers by providing readymade networks and leadership support in executive headteachers.

Local and National Networks

Headteachers who do not work in a MAT equally value support from outside their school to share the cognitive load; however, only in some LAs do formal mechanisms still exist to establish links between headteachers. Where they do exist, leaders recognise other headteachers as valuable confidents. Many leaders appreciate being partnered with a women headteacher. These leaders perceive a natural empathy and connection, facilitating trust and reducing their feelings of exposure as women headteachers. Chloe articulates, "I was conscious about being a female headteacher, particularly in a secondary school. A buddying system operates in Lancashire, which I have used. I particularly asked to be buddied up with another women headteacher."

Despite the emergence and growth of national networks such as SSAT and #WomenEd, only a few leaders describe these networks as influential in helping them connect to other leaders meaningfully to improve how they work or reduce the stress of headship.

Leadership Coaching

Despite the increasing popularity of coaching in education in the last decade (Sardar & Galdames, 2018), few leaders in this study have access to or the opportunity for leadership coaching. Leaders with a leadership coach stress the value of having a trusted reciprocal thinking partner, enabling them to assess situations through different lenses. In contrast to Thornton (2014), none perceive coaching as a burden due to time constraints. The isolation of the headship is seen as negated by a trusted coach. As suggested by Sardar and Galdames (2018), coaching provides a safe space to discuss situations openly and as well as to think about them differently and, as a result, achieve their goals more efficiently. Coaching can provide an important space for professional learning, skill development and confidence building, as Jane articulates:

> The value of leadership coaching is to be able to talk through significant decisions or problems. You feel more confident in the ultimate decision and make sure that even though there is never a right and wrong decision, you know there are just better or worse ones. (Jane)

The importance of leadership coaching for professional development and enabling courageous leaders is well documented (Earley, et al., 2011; Sardar & Galdames, 2018). Although limited due to the cohort size, these findings confirm the value of leadership coaching to women headteachers, enabling them to lead effectively whilst having the time and energy to sustain a healthy family life.

Managing Time: Strategies Employed

Working 60 or in excess of 60 hours a week means that leaders' working hours can negatively impact their mothering and work-life balance. Managing the time demands of mothering and leadership is perceived as one of the most significant challenges (Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011a). However, the findings from this study demonstrate that leaders in setting time and space boundaries on their work create the conditions to make the role of headship sustainable with mothering. In the home, women leaders and their partners, by resisting an essentialist gender discourse, create time to make the role of headteacher more sustainable with mothering.

Diary Management

Headteachers strongly emphasise the importance of effective time management at work. A key strategy is effective diary organisation, including the accurate setting of deadlines and prioritisation of tasks:

> Being as organised as possible is essential, which involves finding ways of categorising, prioritising, and delegating effectively. Integral to this is deciding how much time and energy certain things warrant. You should ensure you have effectively blocked your time and do not over-commit. How to organise your time but also your energy and your headspace makes the job manageable. (Jane)

Many leaders share that the organisation of time is easier for a headteacher than a senior leader because the headteacher has power over their diaries, enabling them to define time according to their priorities. Gemma articulates:

> The higher up you are, the easier it is when you have children because you are more in charge of your own time. You are more in control of your own boundaries and workload. It is actually easier to be a headteacher and a mother than to be any other senior leader. (Gemma)

This power to control and organise time is often not afforded to other senior leaders (Smith, 2016). Another factor afforded to headteachers that assist in effectively organising their diaries is a Personal Assistant (PA). Many leaders stress the importance of the strategic employment of a PA to organise their diaries, especially to protect their family time. Ellie describes how her PA organises her diary to protect time with her children, "Working days are usually Mondays and Thursdays when my husband usually has the children. It is my way of catching up, and my PA organises my work to fit in this way."

Managing Information Communication Technologies (ICT)

Most leaders view the flexibility that modern ICT provides to work outside of school as an advantage in managing their workload more effectively. Email, a common mode of communication in schools, has become a significant part of school leaders' work (Ottestad & Gudmundsdottir, 2018), and reading and responding to emails, in line with recent research, make up a large part of leaders' work beyond normal school hours (Pollock & Hauseman, 2019). Most leaders choose to have the school email account on their phone, which enables them to respond to emails sooner rather than later, which they perceive to be an important way to manage their workload. Karen explains, "I would rather answer emails as they come in quickly, sort them and know what is there. I have always merged my email on my phone in order to deal with it. It is what works for me." Also, managing emails on the phone allows leaders to use time, which

is otherwise redundant, for example, waiting in a queue and travelling on public transport. Deborah highlights, "Technology helps because you can be on a train or in a queue somewhere and answer emails, and you have to try to take advantage of those things to be as efficient as you can be." There has been little research in the field of educational leadership about how ICTs can facilitate a work-life balance for school leaders. However, ICT clearly has the potential to allow otherwise unproductive time to be used (Uthpala Senarathne Tennakoon, 2021).

The development of fast-paced technologies has been recognised as a cause of the fast-paced nature of headteachers' work and their long working hours due to the accessibility of work at all times, even at home (Wang et al., 2022). Leaders recognise the potential of ICT to increase their work hours and intrude on their family life:

> I should have more rules on setting boundaries for checking emails when I am at home. That is the aspect of my work I am not very good at because emails are on my phone, and I can see them pop up. I should probably think about doing something about that because it means that there is continuity with work that goes just on and on. (Isabel)

Isabel's comment reflects the findings of Pollock & Hauseman's (2019) study, which suggests that the increased volume of email has intensified the headteacher's work and transformed the role into a position without defined hours or workplace. The anywhere connectedness of employees to their work can blur the boundaries between work and home and make achieving a work-life balance more difficult (Brue, 2019; Fenner & Renn, 2004; McMullan, et al., 2018; Pollock & Hauseman, 2019; Uthpala Senarathne Tennakoon, 2021). Therefore, participating leaders foreground the importance of imposing rules on using ICT to boundary their work from their home life. The personal rules leaders impose to achieve a healthy work-life balance and create

quality family time include cut-off times for answering emails, muting email notifications pushing through in the evenings and removing work emails from personal phones during the holidays. Imposing restrictions on when to check emails to demarcate work and home emerges as an important part of protecting leaders' well-being, as Sharon explains:

> When I first arrived, my email was configured so that every time I got an email, it came up on my phone, and after I changed that. I can access email on my phone if I go into it deliberately, and I feel that is a lot healthier than the constant notifications pushing through (Sharon)

As in my study, headteachers and teachers increasingly integrate ICT into their pedagogical practices in response to innovation and professional demands (Ottestad & Gudmundsdottir, 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic has only accelerated this integration (Quinn, 2022). Within education (Pollock & Hauseman, 2019) and beyond education, there is a lack of consensus about whether work-related ICT use after normal working hours creates an imbalance between work and life domains or can help to restore the balance between domains by enabling high productivity and flexibility (Bauwens, et al., 2020; Uthpala Senarathne Tennakoon, 2021). My findings suggest that ICT offers school leaders opportunities to achieve a personally suitable balance through the adaptability and flexibility ICT offers; however, only through the imposition of rules to manage ICT use after normal working hours.

Further research is required on the implications of work-related ICT use after hours for school leaders. The implications are likely to be highly gendered because long-waged hours can compete with domestic and childcare responsibilities (Hewlett & Luce, 2006; ONS, 2021). Previous research (Coleman, 2002; 2011; Fuller, 2013; Smith, 2011a) on

women headteachers did not consider the influence of ICT on headteacher workload. The initial findings from this study suggest that for some school leaders, ICT use, well managed, may add flexibility to the management of workload, which can facilitate mothering by enabling school leaders/mothers to make use of redundant time and maximise quality time with their children.

Commuting Time

Reducing commuting time is an important strategy head and executive headteachers employ to maximise time at work and with their families. Most leaders choose purposefully to work close to home; the longest commute to work is 30 minutes. Isabel explains her decision to work close to home, "The time I save from commuting is time I can give to work or my family. It feels much more balanced and supportive." These findings confirm research that suggests that when a woman becomes a mother, commuting time and geographical location of work and home become more important (Francis-Devine, 2022; Joyce & Norris Keiller, 2018; Smith, 2016).

Family Time at Weekends and School Holidays

All leaders work beyond normal working hours, so planning when to work to prioritise time for their families is a crucial aspect of motherhood as a school leader. Most leaders carve out time for work beyond the school day, in the evenings, once their children have gone to bed, which impacts the least on their family lives. Sharon shares, "I am happy to sacrifice time in the week. So, very much, the weekends are mine because that is when we are home as a family." Also, school holidays are an especially

important time for all leaders in sustaining a balance between work and family; holidays compensate for the long hours they work in term time. Mel articulates, "My holiday time is precious. It is really, really precious. We plan that carefully, and I try to maximise the holidays as much as possible." Leaders demonstrate in this way that working long hours does not necessarily mean reducing quality time with their children (Bianchi et al., 2006; Neilson & Stanfors, 2018).

Personal Leisure Time

Work-life balance is subjective. Leaders define a healthy work-life balance in terms of achieving sustainable work patterns, which allow sufficient energy and time to spend with their families. Their definitions align with Greenhaus et al. (2003) and Valcour (2007), who stress the importance of satisfaction and time across work/life/family roles. Most leaders are happy with their work-life balance because of the satisfaction they derive from their leadership roles. Furthermore, the support structures and strategies they employ at work and home help them to achieve a personally suitable balance. However, most report that personal time has come under duress and is traded off for family time. Fran explains:

> The things that get lost are the things for yourself, are they not? That is the issue because you can do your work and you can do the children, but finding time to go for a run or do the other things for me, I cannot. I am trying desperately to fit them in. (Fran)

Women's prioritisation of family time over their personal time confirms the gendered nature of time, and how women use and perceive time creates "time cultures" that sustain gender inequities (Bryson & Deery, 2010). Although leaders do not share how their men partners use their time, fathers often have more control over their time

outside of work because they do not feel the same pull of family obligations and childcare as mothers (Bryson & Deery, 2010; Ennis, 2020). Most leaders sacrifice leisure time to spend time with their children, especially mothers of toddlers, suggesting the discourse of intensive mothering is not entirely resisted, making balancing work, family, and personal lives harder (Hermann et al., 2014).

Many leaders are aware of the importance of carving out time for themselves for their well-being. Sharon describes being firm with herself, recognising the importance of prioritising leisure activities, "I do yoga. It is lovely. I had stopped, but I started again in the last couple of weeks, that has been the result of me giving myself a bit of a talking to going." However, leaders do not intimate that they feel burnout or are concerned about their well-being. As mentioned, the rewards headteachers gain from their work appear to compensate for the personal sacrifices made to their own leisure time. In this way, these findings deviate from research, which suggests that lacking time for oneself is a cause of work-family conflict (Bianchi et al., 2006) and can lead to stress and burnout (Asher, 2012; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021).

Motherhood: Reframing the Discourse

The dominant discourse on motherhood is intensive mothering, which positions the mother as the primary caregiver and marginalises the father's role as incompetent (Hays, 1996; Rich, 2021; Vernier et al., 2022). In line with previous literature (Coleman, 2002; 2011; Smith, 2016), balancing personal and professional responsibilities concerns most participating leaders. The assumption that women are primarily responsible for child-rearing and domestic responsibilities has traditionally constrained women's educational leadership careers (Coleman, 2002; 2011; Smith, 2016).

However, my findings challenge the resilience of these assumptions and demonstrate how when women and their partners resist dominant essentialist gender discourse, a more fluid and flexible performance of parenting may be constructed. Leaders' resistance to intensive mothering creates space for fathers to construct a more flexible performance of parenting. Fathers' resistance to gendered norms to be active fathers importantly creates time for leaders to work and spend quality time with their children. For a few participants who are lone parenting, the resistance of intensive mothering enables a more flexible performance of mothering, drawing upon the support of friends to rear their children. Structurally, the provision of flexible, quality, organised childcare is essential to most leaders' parenting, especially those in dual-earning families.

Support with Child-rearing

Most leaders in heteronormative families resist patterns of intensive mothering, which prioritises the mother as the primary caregiver (Hays, 1996). Significantly, leaders and their partners perform parenting in a way that positions both mothers and fathers as central to everyday family life. Fathers, along with mothers, are concerned with and anticipate the needs of childrearing, as demonstrated by Jane's description:

> He will get them ready in the mornings, take them to school, pick them up from school, ferry them to activities and things, and cook dinner for them. Then, depending on what time I get home, I might put them to bed and read them a story, or he might do that. (Jane)

Leaders' narratives reveal that the decision-making power regarding family functioning is equally shared, resisting intensive mothering discourse (Hays, 1996), where fathers play a limited role. Jill's statement is a clear example of the shared nature of her

family's decision-making: "After the birth of our twins, my husband and I talked a lot and decided for one of us to stay at home." Similarly, leaders constantly use 'we' throughout their narrative on the negotiations about family life, as can be seen in Olivia's description of how she and her partner navigate the demands of their family life:

> Good communication and organisation are important in sharing parental responsibilities – we have a whiteboard on the fridge to map out what we do and our commitments for the week and the weekend. We divide what we do and constantly try to talk about it, keeping it balanced and fair. (Olivia)

Furthermore, contrary to the principles of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), fathers are not depicted as incompetent. On the contrary, fathers' contributions are highly valued. Fathering is praised, and there is no evidence of maternal gatekeeping (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). Maternal gatekeeping refers to a mother's protective beliefs and control over how much a father should be involved in child-rearing. In contrast, leaders feel their husbands' control over their children's rearing is crucial to their work-life balance. Susan emphasises, "The support I get at home from my husband is essential. I do not have to worry about the daughter who is still at home, as he will be there to do things for her." Even leaders who are separated from the father of their children, at a time when maternal gatekeeping often intensifies due to the ensuing power struggles over child custody, appreciate the father's support in their children's rearing and how his support contributes to their work-life balance.

Importantly, when leaders discuss fathers' involvement, they do not do so only in terms of enriching but of replacing their own parenting. Jill is not alone among the cohort,

who describes her husband as the "main carer". In this sense, leaders lauding fathers for taking care of their children is related to equality claims and does not reflect an intensified child centrism, which can increase the burden on themselves as mothers (Bianchi, 2000). Leaders' partners enactment of parenting is crucial in enabling their leadership. As Chloe articulates, the distribution of childcare tasks enables her to meet the demands of headship, which can often clash with the logistics of parenting:

> Having a husband who is understanding and supportive of my career and being prepared to take on a significant amount of childcare and running the children around while I work late or at parents' evenings has been massive. (Chloe)

For most leaders in this study, their partner's active involvement in parenting is essential, enabling them to manage the time demands of headship and, equally importantly, reducing the emotional and cognitive burden of parenting. Fran's words best encapsulate leaders' appreciation of having a partner who can anticipate the needs of parenting and running a home:

> At home, I am lucky to have another half who is happy to look after the children. He works part-time, and it is hugely supportive. I do not need to worry about the children or home. (Fran)

My findings demonstrate a shift in the expectations and discourse of parenting in the last decade; earlier research suggests that women headteachers remain primarily responsible for child-rearing and only rarely, if at all, are fathers/husbands mentioned in providing support (Coleman 2002; 2005; 2011; Bradbury and Gunter, 2006; Fuller 2009; Smith, 2011a; 2016). Furthermore, the engagement of leaders' husbands in child-rearing deviates from the research, which proposes in the last 50 years, the decline of the male breadwinner model and the emergence of dual-earner families has

not translated into a more equal share of household activities and parenting (Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020; ONS, 2021; Vernier et al., 2022).

Most leaders' commitment to sharing the division of care more equally demonstrates resistance to the intensive mothering discourse and may contribute to a more equal share of parenting by valuing and creating the space for fathers to parent. Fairclough's (2020) research on professional couples committed to egalitarian ideals about the division of care suggests that when couples are more influenced by the expectations to parent intensively in ways that demand more from the mothers, paternal involvement becomes more complicated. In Nordic countries, notwithstanding more advanced policy frameworks supporting participative fatherhood, a gender pay gap remains, explained by the power of the discourse on intensive mothering (Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018).

Many leaders' husbands negotiate to reduce their work hours to prioritise the care of their children. In this way, the findings confirm recent research that fathers are keen to be more involved in caring for their children (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). Macro features such as the policy framework promoting participative fatherhood are perhaps beginning to change the discourse and behaviour of fathers. My findings deviate from a traditional picture where men continue to perform the role of primary earner, rarely reducing work hours for caregiving activities. Many leaders' partners work part-time or are not employed to support childcare. Leaders' narratives in explaining these family decisions suggest that their partners have overcome or may not fear the stigma beyond the home, often quoted in the literature, which can be associated with men caring for children (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Birkett & Forbes, 2018; Kelland et al.,

2022). Fran describes her partner as someone "who is just very happy to look after the children." In this sense, the enactment of fatherhood appears to be beginning to align with policy developments encouraging participative fatherhood, despite structural challenges highlighted in research associated with the access to flexible working for fathers (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Birkett & Forbes, 2018; Moss & O'Brien, 2019). Furthermore, even when both parents hold full-time professional roles, in contrast to recent research, there is limited evidence that the man's career takes precedence (Kelland et al., 2022).

The sharing of child-rearing minimises conflict between the two roles the women perform as leader and mother. Previous research on mothering and work emphasises the challenges presented by role conflict (Hamplova, 2019; Hewlett & Luce, 2006; Rich, 2021). The key tension research identifies between motherhood and leadership is the conflict between a role at work, which requires long hours and is emotionally demanding, and performing a patriarchal construct of motherhood, which requires equally long hours of childcare and necessitates high emotional input (Hamplova, 2019; Hewlett & Luce, 2006; Rich, 2021). Previous gender educational leadership research equally highlights the pressure role conflict places on women headteachers (Coleman, 2002; 2005; Fuller, 2013; Smith, 2016). Coleman (2005) concluded that women headteachers become overly occupied by the guilt engendered by their role conflict, and the mothers' narratives in Smith's (2016) research are characterised by descriptions of home-work conflicts in their daily lives. Leaders' partners' role in sharing caring responsibilities minimises leaders' role conflict so they can perform mothering without the burden of significant guilt damaging their well-being.

A headteacher shows the enduring nature of essentialist gender roles when she describes herself as "fortunate" and "atypical of a female headteacher" to have a woman partner. She goes on to describe how her partner because she is a woman, "has taken the lion's share of the home duties. My life is desperately facilitated by having a housewife." Based on observation of other headteachers, she reflects a perception that other women partnered with men are responsible for most of the child-rearing. However, the findings from this study suggest that there is emerging dissonance in the performance of parenting, which allows men and women to take the "lion's share" of the home duties. These findings suggest there is diversity, at least in individual practices of parenting, that is challenging essentialist notions of gender and parenting (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019).

The Cognitive Labour of Child-rearing

Even though leaders describe their partners as central to family life, a few leaders position themselves according to more stereotypical expectations of parental roles when discussing how the cognitive labour of family life is shared. My findings on this area of labour are limited. A few leaders who discuss this aspect of childrearing suggest they assume a greater proportion of cognitive labour. As Gemma articulates, "I probably do all the thinking if that makes sense (laughs). I do all the planning; I sort of drive our lives forward. I will do the shopping, buy everything we need, and organise things." These findings align with previous research suggesting studies that ignore cognitive labour are likely to underestimate the gender gap (Daminger, 2019). However, there is little evidence to suggest in leaders' narratives that this aspect of

labour is a source of ongoing stress or distraction from their leadership roles (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021).

High-quality childcare

The availability of high-quality childcare most leaders stress is an important factor in enabling their leadership, employing childcare at some point to assist when their children are pre-school aged or when their partner is in full-time paid employment. A nanny or a childminder is identified as the type of childcare that works best with their families' busy schedules. Nursery opening times often conflict with their and their partners' working schedules. One headteacher describes the employment of a childminder as "life-changing". Crucially, childcare enables leaders to focus on their work when needed rather than being distracted by the logistics of parenting. It equally minimises their guilt about their time away from their children. Karen best sums up the importance of organising quality childcare that suits the needs of her family, "You cannot underestimate the value of good childcare. It enables you to feel good and confident in your role at work and good and competent in your role as a mother." Organised childcare is an important factor in enabling women to work in paid employment, by offering practical childcare to facilitate women's physical absence from the home. Also, the quality of the childcare is an important factor in enabling women to resist the discourse of intensive mothering and work without the incumbent maternal guilt, which the literature evidences has a detrimental impact on women's well-being and self-efficacy (Aarntzen et al., 2019; Borelli et al., 2017; Glavin et al., 2011). My findings strengthen the literature, emphasising the importance of high-quality organised childcare at institutional, local and national levels in enabling

parents, especially mothers, to participate in paid employment (Asher, 2012; Fuller, 2009; Hochlaf & Cohen, 2021; Smith, 2016).

My findings do not suggest difficulty accessing high-quality organised childcare, despite the decline in the provision of organised childcare in England on a national and local level due to government underfunding and pressure on staffing (Summer, 2022; Ofsted, 2020). There is a wide variation in childcare provision in England; London has nearly eight times more childcare providers than the entire Northeast of England (Clark, 2021). The regional variation in childcare provision has been put forward to explain the regional variation in women headteachers (Fuller, 2009). Leaders in the study come from across England; however, none discuss finding access to high-quality childcare challenging, which may be explained by their ability to afford childcare. Although the availability of high-quality childcare is not the only factor in improving women's representation in secondary school headship, my findings identify the importance of organised childcare to enable women to manage the roles of mother and headteacher.

Support with Child-rearing from Grandparents

Few participating leaders draw on the support of grandparents for childcare, emphasising further the importance of sharing child-rearing with their partner and the value of childcare. Only in extraordinary circumstances do many leaders rely on grandparents to support them with childcare. Most leaders explain how their or their partner's parents live too far away for them to offer day-to-day assistance with childcare. In some cases, grandparents spend part of the year abroad. There is limited

research into the familial support headteachers draw upon to manage their family lives (Coleman, 2011; Edge, 2014; Smith, 2011a; 2011b; 2016). In Smith's study (2011b), older participants highlight the importance of grandparents' support, which agrees with the experiences of some of the women leaders in Coleman's (2011) study. However, grandparents' support is unusual for younger mothers in the study (Smith, 2011b). My findings strengthen Smith's findings, perhaps suggesting a weakening of family structures in the twenty-first century (Smith, 2016). However, participating leaders are white Europeans. Therefore, these findings may not replicate across more ethnically diverse families and research into a more diverse cohort may realise different results.

Sharing Domestic Labour

A division of household labour, which does not fall into traditional patterns regardless of the employment status of partners, is crucial support in enabling leaders' mothering and leadership. Most leaders' narratives stress the equal division of domestic labour; leaders repeatedly use the words "dual", "share", and "split". Isabel, whose partner works in a demanding full-time leadership role, explains how "there is a real dual responsibility caring for them and for the home." In the few cases where the leaders' partner works away from home, household labour is not described as a source of tension. Both partners recognise and negotiate realistic expectations of what can be done. These findings offer a unique contribution by challenging previous literature, which points to the endurance of traditional essentialist gendered roles, attributing the responsibility of domestic labour, cooking and cleaning to women (Asher, 2012; Bryan, 2020; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020), even among dual-income families (Murat Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020; ONS, 2021). In this study, by

sharing the responsibility for domestic labour, men can be seen to transgress dominant essentialist gender discourse and challenge the traditional performativity of masculinity.

Most leaders confirm that their partner's support with domestic responsibilities, regardless of gender, minimises conflict between the two roles of leader and mother. Previous research has underlined how role conflict, experienced by mothers who work in professional roles, places women under considerable stress (Hamplova, 2019; Hewlett & Luce, 2006; Rich, 2021). As well as conflict between mothering and working, academics point to the rate of women entering the job market and the unequal decline in their domestic responsibilities, engendering conflict (Hamplova, 2019; Hewlett & Luce, 2006; Rich, 2021).

A salient finding is that for women to establish and sustain a work-life balance, the sharing of domestic labour is an important factor. The concept of the 'second shift' (Hochschild & Machung, 1989) is often used to explain women's underrepresentation in leadership and the gender pay gap (ASCL, NAHT, NGA, & #WomenEd, 2021). If women, unlike men, work outside and within the home, their energies for their careers are diminished, and their well-being is negatively impacted. Leaders' positive experiences of sharing cooking and cleaning mean they have time and energy for mothering and leadership. However, care must be taken not to extrapolate from these findings that there has been a shift in the gendered performances of labour in the home. Research conducted since the pandemic suggests the reality may differ from leaders' perceptions. Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir (2021) show that women and men

being forced into their homes during lockdown revealed inequalities in the division of household labour mothers and fathers had previously been too busy to notice.

Reflections on Practical Mothering: Reframing the Discourse of Leading and Parenting

Leaders frame their leadership within an inclusive and distributed discourse (Day et al., 2009; Harris, 2008; Leithwood, 2019). Therefore, establishing a collegiate and aligned senior team is crucial support to enable their leadership and manage the increasing demands and complexity of the role. Professional support external to school is also highlighted as diminishing the potential isolation of headship and the level of responsibility incumbent on the role. The experience of leaders working within a MAT suggests that MAT organisational structures can offer valuable support for headteachers. Although the value of leadership coaching in making the work of headship more realisable has been well documented (Earley et al., 2011; Sardar & Galdames, 2018), my findings reveal that access to coaching is often limited.

Maximising time is a crucial aspect of performing leadership and mothering. The findings suggest that mothering incentivises better work management, and headship can give women more opportunities to boundary work to protect family life. Outside of work, ICT creates opportunities for maximising the use of time. However, imposing rules to manage ICT usage is crucial because the anywhere connectedness ICT facilitates can blur the lines between work and family. Maximising time to work during the week enables leaders to prioritise family at weekends and school holidays. Sharing

child-rearing and domestic responsibilities with their partners allows leaders to mother by focusing their energies on quality time with their children.

Crucially, my findings propose that how gender is performed has significant implications for establishing equality in the workplace and the home. By resisting intensive mothering discourse, leaders can be seen to transgress an essentialist gender discourse, creating space for their careers and allowing partners to parent. Importantly, women's partners' performance of gender does not conform to gendered norms. Partner's role in sharing child-rearing and domestic responsibilities in the home is essential support to reduce and, in many cases, resolve the leader's role conflict and maternal guilt. Unlike in previous studies, leaders are not preoccupied with the guilt engendered by role conflict (Coleman, 2002, 2005; Fuller, 2013; Smith, 2016). My findings demonstrating the importance of active fathers deviate from previous research, highlighting the challenges for women managing leadership whilst fulfilling the role of the primary caregiver (Coleman, 2002; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Smith, 2011a). Although leaders point to various professional structures that support them to lead their schools more effectively, creating more time and emotional space for mothering, the personal support in the home makes the most difference to their mothering and leadership.

Section 4: Women's Future Career Aspirations

The gender in educational leadership research has predominantly focused on women headteachers (Moorosi, 2019). In the last 12 years, the expansion of MATs has meant that the number of executive headteachers and CEOs has increased significantly.

Both leadership roles often involve significant remuneration and power (Belger, 2022). However, women are significantly underrepresented; only a third of the top 300 highest-paid CEOs are women (Belger, 2022). There is limited research on the factors disrupting women's accession to these top leadership positions. My findings on leaders' career aspirations provide a knowledge base for this under-researched area, addressing the subsidiary research question: What are the future aspirations of women secondary headteachers, and how does family influence their aspirations? The analysis focuses specifically on the intersection between leadership and motherhood and the influence mothering has on women's educational leadership careers.

Serendipitous Approach to Career Planning

Neither the headteachers nor executive headteachers in the study have seriously considered their next career move. Leaders consider opportunities as they arise but do not actively seek promotions. Olivia describes, "This school is a big school. I will be here for some time. But there are the inevitable conversations about Trusts, and if that brings another step, so be it." Similar to their journey into headship, leaders continue to construct their careers within a women's educational leadership discourse by conforming with perceived ways of women managing their careers in an ad hoc, serendipitous approach (Coleman, 2002; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a)

A salient finding is that most leaders appear to be content to stay in their current position, which for most is their first headship until they retire. No participating headteacher is currently contemplating a second headship or an executive headship in another Trust. The executive headteachers amongst the sample became executive headteachers in the same school or Trust they were first appointed headteachers. In

McKillop & Moorosi's (2017) study, the women headteachers wish to remain in their first headship. McKillop & Moorosi's (2017) findings suggest that the challenges of the first year of headship deter women from seeking out a second headship or a more senior leadership role due to the reluctance to face the same if not greater challenges again; once experiencing confidence and stability within headship, women tend to remain in that role in the same school (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). Men, in contrast, behave differently; identifying success as an end goal motivates them to seek promotion to achieve higher status (Hartman & Barber, 2020). A tendency of women to remain in the first headship, unlike their men counterparts, possibly due to the challenges faced in the first year of headship, highlights the importance of supporting headteachers in their first year or establishing rigorous preparation for aspiring headteachers to address the underrepresentation of women in executive headship (Fuller, 2017)

Many leaders are in the first or second year of headship, which means the current opportunities and challenges stop them from considering their next career step. Isabel articulates, 'For me, I cannot really see beyond this at the moment anyway." Fran agrees, "I feel like I am still quite new as a headteacher, and there is a long job to do in my school. It does not feel like I want to do anything else yet." Most leaders find the first year of headship challenging and absorbing. Therefore, perhaps it is not surprising that they do not consider the next steps at this point in their career, which confirms recent research on women's experience of headship (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). However, the most important reason leaders articulate for wishing to stay in their current role is their contentment and strong attachment to their school. Karen articulates, "I love the job that I do, and I will retire in this position, whenever that is."

Leaders' drive to serve their schools and local communities can be seen as conforming to a gendered leadership discourse (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Torrence et al., 2017), which serves to temper career aspirations.

The Influence of Age and Gender

In many leaders' narratives, age appears to influence how they envisage their future careers. Leaders in their late 40s and early 50s position themselves as close to retirement and, therefore, see their current locations as their last posts. Chloe articulates, "I see this being the job I stay in until I retire. I am now 48." Similarly, Karen says, "I am quite happy with the position that I have got to at the age I am. I will retire in this position." Considering only 10% of headteachers retire below the retirement age (Lynch & Worth, 2017), headteachers can expect a long career from the age of 48. Some research suggests age influences how men, but more often, women envisage their professional futures (Edge, et al., 2022; Guihen, 2018). There is no difference in the approach to their careers between Generation X and Millennials within the sample, and neither group of women have plans for their next steps. However, the Identity intersection of gender and age seems to be acting as a barrier, even unconsciously, as an internalised assumption that women at 50 are in the twilight of their careers (Guihan, 2018).

The Influence of Family on Career Aspirations

Family significantly influences leaders' future career aspirations and hinders them from actively seeking progression — specifically, family influences where they are

willing to work. Headteachers and executive headteachers express reluctance to disrupt their children's routine or lengthen their commuting time to work. Ellie explains, "My family are important in terms of location and where I would be prepared to live. How far away from them and all of those sorts of things." As children grow older, the geographical boundaries on leaders' careers become stronger as they prioritise their children's education over their careers. Susan clarifies how "the biggest restriction for my career is that I am tied to the location that they want to be in." My findings strengthen research explaining the gender pay gap, which suggests that after a woman becomes a mother, commuting time to work and geographical location of work and home become more important, restricting women's career choices and negatively affecting their earnings (Francis-Devine, 2022; Joyce & Norris Keiller, 2018). These geographical barriers that women leaders impose on their careers may explain the regional differences in the representation of women at headship and executive headship (Fuller 2017). The proportion of women secondary headteachers is higher where there is a higher concentration of secondary schools: women are represented in higher proportions in secondary headship in South-East England and South London (44.5%) than in the north of England (33.6%) (Fuller, 2017).

The language leaders use when discussing the influence of family on their next steps reveals most clearly the continuing influence of the intensive mothering discourse. Most leaders stress how future career decisions are underpinned by family considerations and unequivocally place their children's needs ahead of their own. When discussing possible promotion, Ellie uses the language of putting her "family life at risk" and is adamant she will "not do that." Her choice of language here is interesting, reflecting the internalisation of implicit and explicit messaging in the media of the damage or benefits that working mothers present to children (Smith, 2016). The choice

of the media to present mothers rather than fathers as the cause of social ills reinforces the discourse that the parent who is ultimately responsible for caring is the mother (Smith, 2016). Susan agrees, "They do not want to move, and I would not move them." Fran concurs: "My children would always come first." Unlike the women headteachers in Coleman's (2002) study, participating leaders do not see themselves as primarily responsible for the domestic domain; however, my findings suggest that women's career decisions with children continue to be heavily influenced by the needs of their family and informed by an essentialist discourse relating to women's primary role (Smith, 2016), potentially limiting women's leadership careers.

My findings suggest a significant shift in the socially constructed norms about the relative value of men's and women's work outside the home. Previous gendered educational leadership research highlights how women's career advancement is limited by women needing to move location and role to accommodate their partner's careers (Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011b; Fuller, 2010). However, few participating leaders' career decisions are influenced by their partner's careers. Unlike previous research (Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011b; Fuller, 2010), my findings challenge the cultural adherence to the male breadwinner ideology, where the father's career takes priority over the mother's (Kelland et al., 2022).

The study's small number of executive headteachers reflects the current picture where women are even more underrepresented in leadership structures beyond headship (Fuller, 2017; Belger, 2022). The unequal gender distribution in these structures raises questions about the location of power and decision-making (Fuller, 2017), especially as schools increasingly combine to form academy chains and Trusts, raising questions about the reality of site-based leadership. 200 of the 300 highest-paid Trust CEOs are

men, and only two of the top 20 are women (Belger, 2022). Further research into understanding the reasons behind women's reluctance to advance to executive headship and the potential barriers is important to address the underrepresentation of women in the highest leadership positions (Fuller, 2017; Belger, 2022).

Reflections: Women's Future Career Aspirations

Patterns defining leaders' career journey to headship explain their future aspirations. Most leaders' approach to their careers is serendipitous. Those who are established in their roles await opportunities rather than actively seek them out or construct a plan for advancement. However, many leaders are content to stay in their current role, which strengthens Mckillop & Moorosi's (2017) findings on women headteachers being more likely to stay in their first headship. Although Mckillop & Moorosi (2017) explain this tendency by the challenges women face in their first year deterring them, the findings of this study suggest a more complex relationship of factors. The incorporation of essentialist gender discourses means that many leaders' future aspirations are influenced by the needs of their children and age. However, the challenges most leaders experience in their first year confirm the importance of systemic support for headteachers in their first year of headship to retain headteachers and support future aspirations for executive head positions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

My study was inspired by professional concerns about the continued underrepresentation of women in headship in English secondary schools and built upon focused gender research carried out in the UCL Centre for Leadership Learning within the Young Global City Leaders (YGCL) project (Edge, 2014). My doctoral research has set out to explore the perceived opportunities and challenges of combining headship and motherhood experienced by a small group of women head and executive headteachers. While collecting data on the YGCL project (Edge, 2014), women leaders repeatedly expressed their concerns about combining motherhood and leadership, whereas men leaders rarely raised the issue of family. Often, women deputy headteachers reported that concerns around the incompatibility of motherhood and headship deterred them from applying for headship. Literature in educational leadership research continues to highlight how the challenges of establishing a balance between family and work are an important barrier to women's educational leadership careers because the responsibility of childcare tends to lie with the mother (Moorosi, 2019).

Coleman's (2001; 2002; 2003; 2005; 2007; 2010; 2011; 2022), Smith's (2011a; 2011b; 2016) and Fuller's (2009; 2010; 2013; 2014; 2016; 2017) research raises awareness of the women's underrepresentation in secondary school leadership and explores the challenges facing women, touching on women's perceptions of the challenges of combining family with leadership. Building upon this work, much of which was carried

out over a decade ago, my doctoral thesis focuses exclusively on women headteachers and executive headteachers with dependant-aged children in English secondary schools. I have examined how mothering has influenced their careers and how leadership informs their mothering, paying attention to the professional and personal support they draw upon.

The writings of Butler and Foucault have influenced the design and sustained the overarching theoretical framework for this study. Both have been used extensively by researchers seeking to explain the choices and behaviours of women and men in educational settings and the home. Butler's work has been employed by feminist scholars seeking to explain and challenge gender inequality. The employment of a poststructuralist lens allowed me to look at dissonance in normative social practices and challenge essentialist gender binaries. Rich (2021) and Hays (1996) have provided central contributions to the analysis of motherhood and the ideology of intensive mothering, which insists that the mother is the primary caregiver of children and must devote her psychological, emotional and intellectual well-being to her children. O'Reilly (2020) offers an alternative lens to reframe motherhood, which is less commonly used, positioning motherhood as a potential site of agency.

Theoretical and Professional Contributions

Headteachers are core to the leadership of schools and fundamental to implementing and sustaining school improvement (Day et al., 2009; Earley, 2022; Leithwood, 2019). Current surveys and media coverage report the growing difficulties of recruiting and retaining headteachers in England (Fullard, 2021; NAHT, 2021; TeacherTapp, 2021). My research, taking a gendered perspective, aims to contribute to the headteacher

profession by providing an insight into how a small group of women headteachers and executive headteachers built their careers and manage their professional lives whilst mothering dependant aged children, challenging widespread perceptions about the incompatibility of motherhood and headship (Moorosi, 2019). My study contributes to the theoretical knowledge on gender in educational leadership, school-level organisational theory, and motherhood to inform future research and the development of policy to support women's careers and family lives better. Furthermore, my study offers recommendations to school and system leaders on how to recruit and retain more women head and executive headteachers.

Theoretical Contribution

My study of English secondary school headteachers navigating leadership whilst mothering dependent-aged children adds to the body of knowledge on gender in educational school leadership and school-level organisational cultures in relation to creating cultures that support work-life balance and motherhood.

Gender in Educational Leadership. The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership has been the central question driving gender in educational leadership research over the last five decades (Moorosi, 2019). Despite inroads in getting more women into top leadership positions (Coleman, 2011), women headteachers do not represent the majority of women staff in secondary schools (Moorosi, 2019), and at executive and chief executive level, women are even more underrepresented (Fuller, 2017; Belger, 2022). The key areas of research in the field of gender in educational leadership, therefore, are barriers approach to understanding

the underrepresentation of women, organisational practices that deter women, and women's ways of leading (Moorosi, 2019).

My study offers a unique contribution to the gender in educational leadership literature by drawing attention to the rewards of leadership for women rather than focusing on the impediments to their careers. Furthermore, by examining leaders' enactment of leadership who are mothers, my study offers an insight into how family may enrich women's school leadership, challenging perceptions that headship and motherhood are incompatible. The perceived rewards of headship, personally and for their family, are crucial in motivating their leadership whilst mothering. My study applying a poststructuralist feminist lens rejects the notion of 'women's ways of leading', which reinforces essentialist constructs of gender. Participating headteachers construct their leadership drawing upon leadership for learning and social justice theory (Earley, 2022; Fuller, 2014; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011) that may be performed by both men and women.

Gender in Educational leadership research has also traditionally focused on women's experiences to the exclusion of men, making gender synonymous with women (Moorosi, 2019). Although my study has focused on women leaders, by considering the performativity of fathering, it offers a unique contribution to the literature. Research continues to highlight how motherhood is a barrier to women's leadership careers (Moorosi, 2019; Rich, 2021; Smith, 2016). However, by examining the role of fathers in the division of home responsibilities and child-rearing, my study demonstrates the importance of men and women transgressing essentialist constructs of gender to position mothering as an asset rather than an impediment. Gender performativity

involves interaction with others, and my study confirms that employing this construct of gender in educational leadership and parenting gives women and men more agency to act in tackling inequality.

School Level Organisational Cultures. Work-life balance has emerged as one of the principal reasons for the diminishing morale of teachers and leaders in English schools, causing them to leave the profession (Earley, 2022; Fuller, 2014; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). However, little attention has been given in educational leadership literature on the conditions that support the creation of organisational cultures that enable staff to enjoy fulfilling family and personal lives. My study highlights the importance: of a leadership vision and articulation where a profound sense of care for staff sits at the heart (Earley, 2022; Woods, et al., 2018; Woods & Macfarlane, 2022); an enactment of leadership that develops collegiality and develops staff (Grogan &Shakesschaft, 2011) and the translation of that vision into policies which promote a work-life balance, to include restrictions on email communication, the timing of meetings and accommodations for caring priorities and flexible working. Although there is extensive literature on the importance of school cultures, which prioritise staff development (Earley, 2022; Harris & DeFlammis, 2016), and on the importance of inclusive distributed models of leadership (Harris, 2008; Harris & DeFlammis, 2016) even the most recent literature (Bingham & Bubb, 2022) addressing teacher well-being and workload, does not explore how to support teachers and leaders to have fulfilling family lives. Head and executive headteachers in my study share how organisational structures continue to intensify the challenges of managing family and work, foregrounding the importance of my findings.

Motherhood Theory. Drawing on gender as a construct and performativity as a conceptual tool, my interpretations of the data propose that women headteachers navigate headship and motherhood by resisting gendered norms. Leaders emphasise their nurturing and rearing responsibilities while claiming assertiveness, determination, and ambition. Crucially, leaders challenge the boundaries between home and work, specifically by importing values from their mothering into their professional role and vice versa. This emerged in my research when school leaders spoke about their mothering influencing their vision for school and enactment of school leadership and when they discussed how leadership enriched and positively influenced their mothering. My findings contribute to the discussion on motherhood by demonstrating that motherhood, often perceived as detrimental to leading an organisation, can be an important positive influence. Also, school leadership, often perceived as incompatible with motherhood, can enrich mothering. In this way, motherhood is reframed as a site of empowerment (O'Reilly, 2020) rather than oppression (Rich, 2021).

Intensive Mothering. My findings corroborate the concept and practices of the discourses of intensive mothering. Leaders reveal the internalisation of intensive mothering discourses specifically in their reflections on their career decisions, the sacrifices they are unwilling to make, and the guilt they experience when working practically and emotionally remove them from their children. Significantly, in contrast to research on gender in educational leadership carried out in the last 20 years (Coleman, 2001; Smith, 2016), women head and executive headteachers, however, resist the main regulatory mechanisms of intensive mothering discourses by retaining a sense of agency and control over their lives, which enables them the emotional space and time to develop their careers. Crucially, positivity about their choice to work

and the personal rewards of headship minimises the influence of leaders' maternal guilt. Leaders resist mother guilt's oppressive influences by reflecting on the social actions that shape their lives and careers.

Intensive mothering relies on traditional gender norms and assumes the mother's availability of time and motivation for intensive practices and emotional involvement, paradoxically at a time when more women work outside the home (Hays, 1996). Although the discourse of fathering has changed, research has evidenced that they can more easily opt out of intensive parenting without being seen as a bad parent; therefore, cultural expectations relating to family and gender have been slow to change (Kelland, et al., 2022; Rich, 2021). However, my findings suggest a shift in the practices of fathering more in line with the discourse of active fathering. The participation of the leaders' partners, including fathers, in child-rearing and domestic duties emerges as one of the main factors in facilitating leaders' careers. In contrast to previous research, leaders are not doing a 'second shift', which enables leaders to spend quality time with their children and time to lead (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). The negotiations that women and men in the study undertake to support their families challenge normative gendered norms. This emerges when women in heteronormative families discuss the division of domestic duties, involvement in paid employment and child-rearing. In this way, the study contributes to the discussion on the importance of broadening the parameters of the performativity of gender to introduce multiplicity in relation to gender. By developing an androgynous discourse in the construction of parenting, along with a notion that care is not a trait of one sex, we can lay the foundation for more equal sharing of child-rearing and school leadership.

Professional Contributions

Reflecting on participants' experiences against the relevant literature provides recommendations for school leaders, local authorities, multi-academy trusts and policymakers facing the challenges of increasing the representation of women in headship for reasons of social justice, but also to tackle to shortage of aspiring headteachers.

My findings confirm previous research that suggests women tend to take advantage of opportunities as they arise rather than purposefully seeking out leadership training and positions as part of a career plan to achieve headship (Coleman, 2002; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Smith, 2011a; Torrence et al., 2017). In addition, the women leaders, in line with previous research, only consider headship once in leadership positions (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). My findings suggest the need for organisational practices to enhance women's career advancement to increase the representation of women in top leadership positions.

My findings identify strategies that influence and enhance women's leadership careers and their aspirations for headship, including 1) mentoring and coaching, 2) early exposure to leadership through secondments, shadowing and development opportunities, and 3) policies that minimise conflicts between work and family.

Mentoring/coaching. Jones (2010) and McKillop & Moorosi (2017) describe the potential of mentoring to enhance under-represented groups' careers. The

importance leaders place on encouragement, and previous headteacher mentoring reinforces the value of mentoring/coaching to support women's careers (Bimrose, et al., 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). Coaching and mentoring can develop leaders' knowledge and skills. A salient finding of my study is the ad hoc and informal nature of the mentoring leaders received, suggesting the importance of a broader systemic intervention to enable an equitable national and local provision.

Early Exposure to Leadership. Leaders participating in this study reflect on how they do not seriously consider headship until in senior leadership. Aligning with previous research (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017), my findings highlight the value of exposing women to school-level leadership early on in their careers. Creating opportunities for women teachers to exercise leadership and shadow leaders to develop their knowledge and skill set enables an insight into the potential of school leadership, which can motivate women to apply for headship. Furthermore, evidence suggests that younger women, especially since the pandemic, may be losing interest in occupying top leadership positions (Moorosi, 2019; TeacherTapp, 2021). However, as leaders in my study demonstrate, women do not appear to be losing their commitment to social justice and change (Moorosi, 2019). Realising the power of headship and executive headship to bring about social change was the turning point in their careers for most leaders, motivating their application for headship. Exposing women to a transformational construct of headship is likely to encourage their aspirations for headship.

Family-friendly Schools. Also, my findings identify a series of strategies that schools on an individual basis can employ to support the work-life balance of parents.

My findings strengthen the literature (Coleman, 2011; Guihen, 2018; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017) that women's careers are highly influenced by family life. Changing school organisational cultures is especially important in retaining and developing women leaders and teachers. Literature suggests that the younger generation of women is choosing not to apply for headship because the masculine culture of some schools does not suit women (Moorosi, 2019). My study confirms how school organisational cultures continue to intensify the sacrifices women have to make (Smith, 2016; Torrence et al., 2017). My findings show that schools can minimise conflict between work and family by adopting policies that accommodate: 1) flexible working requests, 2) teachers' requests to fulfil family commitments, and 3) childcare arrangements in the organisation of meetings and training. Such policies are likely to improve the retention of teachers, especially women teachers and encourage them to apply for leadership positions.

Retaining Women Headteachers

Headteacher unions (NAHT, 2021) and the media (Weale, 2020) highlight the challenges facing schools in retaining headteachers, with recent reports suggesting that the Covid 19 pandemic has only exasperated the challenges (Martin, 2022). A recent survey by the Education Policy Institute predicts that 50% of senior leaders expect to leave the profession by the summer of 2025 (Fullard, 2021). These findings, backed up by the NAHT (2021) survey, point to an impending crisis in school leadership. My findings identify two strategies to support headteacher retention: 1) targeted training on the responsibilities of headship and managing work-life balance

for senior leaders aspiring to headship, and 2) establishment of headteacher networks external to the school.

Preparation for Headship. The challenges leaders encounter in the first year of headship suggest that to retain headteachers, additional training and development would benefit novice headteachers to achieve a balance between their home and work lives. Furthermore, in line with previous research (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017), deputy headship does not appear to prepare headteachers for the degree of responsibility and workload of headship, which then has a negative impact on their family lives. Currently, there is no required qualification or training in England to be a headteacher. However, MATs, LAs, universities and educational charities, when developing leadership training and National Professional Qualifications, may consider training on the responsibilities of headship and challenges of managing a healthy work-life balance to better prepare and help retain headteachers through their early years of headship.

Headteacher Support Networks. Headteachers highly value the support of other headteachers, which they identify as professionally the most important factor in achieving a work-life balance. Where headteachers work in a MAT, there is often a ready-made network and an executive principal to collaborate with and to go to for guidance. However, for those working in local authority schools, networks are more ad hoc. LAs establishing better systems of communication between headteachers to include, where they exist, headteachers in stand-alone academies may increase headteachers' job satisfaction and retention. Leaders identify that they especially appreciate working with other women headteachers. There continues to be a regional

variation in the distribution of women headteachers (Fuller, 2017); a national initiative that establishes communication between women headteachers may substantially raise job satisfaction and retention. Although #WomensEd does attempt to fill this gap, and many women in my study appreciate the space to reach out to other women, leaders prefer face-to-face collaboration.

Policy considerations

Policies reinforcing societal expectations that women are ultimately responsible for childcare have exacerbated women's difficulties in combining school leadership and motherhood. My findings confirm the importance of available, flexible and quality childcare and foreground the importance of a shared parental leave policy that financially and discursively reinforces and enables an androgynous construction of parenting, maximising both men's and women's involvement in child-rearing.

Childcare. This study reinforces the importance of high-quality childcare in supporting women's careers (Hochlaf & Cohen, 2021). Leaders discuss, especially when their children were babies and toddlers, how important childcare was to create time for their career development and minimise maternal guilt. Therefore, the current decline in the provision of organised childcare in England, on a national and local level, with nurseries closing, is a concern (Summer, 2022; Ofsted, 2020). My study suggests the need for additional government funding and a national strategy on the provision of under-five-year-old organised childcare to enable women to develop professional careers.

Family Policy. The study identifies the importance of family-friendly policies to challenge the discourse of intensive mothering and establish alternative discourses of androgyny in the construction of parenting, enabling both parents to parent and pursue professional careers equally. Since the data was collected, a legislative framework has come into place that funds paid parental leave for both parents (Gov.uk, 2022a). However, the scheme still requires mothers to hand maternity leave benefits to their partners. If the UK adopted the EU Work-life Balance directive (EuropeanCommission, 2019), which offers paid entitlement to both parents independent of each other, the complex SPL trade-off calculations would be reduced, creating greater flexibility in how leave is used (O'Brien, 2023). Improving SPL in accordance with the EU directive would promote more equal sharing of the care of young children (O'Brien, 2023). Also, perceived prejudice towards men taking leave in the workplace continues to deter men (Birkett & Forbes, 2018). The inclusion of paternity as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act (Gov.uk, 2010a) would provide legal protection for fathers and reinforce a discourse of participative fathering.

My findings suggest that the fathers' involvement in child-rearing is beginning to align with the discourse of participative fathering (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). At an organisational level, promoting shared parental leave to encourage men to consider the option would begin to break down remaining barriers and encourage social actions that establish more equitable parenting.

Limitations of the research

Methodological Considerations. The primary limitation of my study was the challenges encountered when recruiting the sample and the necessary reliance on snowballing. The consequence was that in line with previous educational leadership research, the sample for this study was narrow due to the predominance of married, heterosexual, white English participants who came forward to be interviewed. In 2018, when the sample was initially constructed, the number of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) women headteachers in English secondary schools was significantly less than 129, based on the percentage of 3.5%, which reflected the proportion of men and women, primary and secondary school headteachers from BME backgrounds (Gov.uk, 2019). Although most English women secondary school headteachers are white and heterosexual (Gov.uk, 2019), the lack of diversity is a legitimate criticism of this study and research in this area (Showunmi & Moorosi, 2022). The sample did include same-sex couples and single mothers, but each cohort was too small to offer significant alternative findings to the main group. Including BME groups will likely produce different results due to intersectional discrimination and different family structures (Showunmi, 2018; Showunmi, 2022; Smith, 2016).

A further limitation is the sample size. The sample of fifteen leaders enabled me to gain deeper insights and understanding of women leaders' careers, the opportunities and challenges of leadership and mothering, and strategies and ways of navigating mothering and leadership. However, I acknowledge the small sample size limits the generalisability of results and that a study of a larger group of women would better facilitate and may be more helpful for policy making.

Another limitation is that the definition of domestic responsibilities, defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (EIGE, 2017) and commonly used in the literature (Asher, 2012; Bianchi, 2000; Bryan, 2020; Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011b) is heavily weighted toward physical activities such as cooking, cleaning, and the logistics of parenting such as picking children up and being present to look after them. The interview instrument asked a series of explicit questions about the division of the physical labour of the household. No questions directly asked about the cognitive dimension of household labour, which can be explained by this dimension of labour being given little attention in sociological literature until recently (Daminger, 2019). As a concept, cognitive labour has previously been undefined and measured, which is problematic, as cognitive labour is abundant in twenty-first-century households and an incomplete understanding of cognitive labour limits understanding of gender equality (Daminger, 2019). The primary dimension of household labour, physical, has been highly gendered (Bianchi, et al., 2012) therefore, cognitive labour is likely to be too (Daminger, 2019). The limited findings from this study confirm that the gender differences in the amount and kind of cognitive work completed by men and women could challenge and reveal an important dimension of inequality between mother/father and women/men roles. Without examining in more detail the sharing of cognitive labour, the findings of this study may underestimate the gender gap in household participation.

Additionally, the data for this study was collected before the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic resulted in significant changes in people's personal lives and disrupted family roles (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). Even in a country that sits at the top of the Gender Gap Index, Iceland has revealed exaggerated stronger gendered norms

and expectations of mothers (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). Research suggests that rather than the pandemic causing gendered differences in the homes, periods of lockdown brought to light pre-existing gendered performances previously overlooked by busy professional couples (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). Therefore, conducting this study after the pandemic may expose different performativity of gender in the home than this research reveals.

Epistemological considerations. The characteristics of the researcher, including gender, play a central role in the research. In this study, the researcher, as a woman and senior leader, in designing, collecting, and analysing the data, surely influenced the understanding of headteachers' careers and motherhood. Whilst I took actions to reduce bias, including dialogue with my supervisory team during fieldwork and analysis, completely escaping this methodological limitation is challenging.

Future Research

This data was collected before the Covid 19 pandemic, sampling a small sample of white women head and executive headteachers. Future research is recommended to 1) capture a larger stratified, more diverse sample; 2) consider the influence of the pandemic on education and parenting; 3) explore the social locations of mothers resisting intensive mothering discourse; 4) explore the potentiality of father-focused educational leadership research.

Intersectionality

The performative construction of gender has significant implications for women's careers and school leadership. However, gender in educational leadership predominantly refers to white women (Fuller, 2013; Moorosi, 2019). Intersectionality continues to be ignored to the exclusion of black women (Moorosi, 2019; Showunmi, 2018; Showunmi, 2022). Further research with a larger stratified sample is necessary to encompass greater diversity and better represent English society. Such a sample would allow an exploration of intersectionality as a lens for uncovering further influencing factors on women's leadership careers. Also, a larger, more ethnically diverse sample would enable the exploration of a wider range of family structures, providing a richer insight into the influence of family on women's leadership and careers.

Although the number of individuals identifying as non-binary and gender fluid is growing (Hines, 2019), there is no research on gender and educational leadership focusing scholarly attention on non-binary and gender-fluid leaders. Future research to include a more gender-diverse sample would allow an exploration of further barriers and opportunities gender performativity presents for leadership and provide a richer insight into the performance of gender and parenting (O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020).

Influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Headteacher Retention and Recruitment

My findings highlight the rewards and opportunities of headship. However, the impact of the pandemic has been to decrease teachers' and leaders' well-being (Fullard, 2021; Martin, 2022). Adapting schools to deliver education during the Covid-19

pandemic and then responding to the consequences of the pandemic, such as gaps in student learning and an increase in student mental ill health, has increased school leaders' workload, anxiety, and stress (Fullard, 2021). A recent survey of women and men headteachers suggests that pressure of headship during the pandemic has been felt more keenly by women headteachers: in 2019, 53% of women headteachers and 52% of men headteachers agreed that stress levels were unacceptable; however, in 2021 this had risen to 76% for women headteachers, compared to 45% for men headteachers (TeacherTapp, 2021). Further research exploring the gendered response to the pandemic is needed to explain the reasons for the stress levels experienced by women and the subsequent influence on women's leadership careers.

The difference in reported anxiety levels between men and women with children under five in the TeacherTapp (2021) survey suggests that mothering and teaching/leading during the pandemic were more challenging for women (TeacherTapp, 2021). Although the findings of my study suggest positive shifts in the division of domestic responsibilities and child-rearing, research conducted during and after the pandemic proposes that inequalities had been overlooked and were exposed during periods of lockdown, increasing women's stress levels (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). Considering an increase in headteacher turnover and senior leaders' declining interest in headship since the pandemic (NAHT, 2021; Walker, 2022), further research into the challenges women experience leading secondary schools whilst mothering is important to secure sustainable leadership for English secondary schools.

Challenging Patriarchal Constructions of Motherhood

A significant theme is the importance of constructing fluid and flexible notions of gendered parenting. Resisting intensive mothering is vital for women to create time for their career development and space for partners to parent. The performativity of gender is dependent on the context, cultural background and history, as those are the locations from which available discourse is drawn (Nentwich, 2008). Little research has been conducted exploring how the women's cultural location, such as class, parents' employment status, and mother's ethnicity, influences the resistance to patriarchal motherhood (O'Brien Hallstein et al., 2020). The importance of mothers' resistance to intensive mothering on women's careers, identity and well-being highlights the value of further research in this area.

Motherhood and mothering are often framed within heterosexual contexts positioning lesbian mothers outside the typical mothering experiences (Park, 2020). Mothers with lesbian identities trouble cultural ideals of motherhood by troubling the father/mother dichotomy itself (Park, 2020). Further research on lesbian mothering and how lesbian mothers incorporate gendered discourse on the performativity of mothering would provide a valuable vantage point from which to interrogate constructions of motherhood.

My findings confirm a connection between mothers' resistance to patriarchal motherhood and participative fathering (Fairclough, 2020) and a growing alignment between a policy discourse of involved fathering and practice. My study focuses on a small cohort of professional couples; further research should be carried out on a larger sample and cross-section of families to establish more rigorous results on the extent

fathers are challenging essentialist gendered norms to actively participate in child-rearing and how far fathers parenting is influenced by mothers parenting.

Father-Focused Educational Leadership Research

The research on gender and educational leadership continues to direct scholarly attention to explaining the barrier motherhood presents for women's leadership careers (Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016; Torrence et al., 2017). However, since Mariane Coleman's (2005a; 2007) and Fuller's (2013) studies, there has been little exploration into the influence of fatherhood on men's educational leadership careers. However, as my research suggests, there has been a shift towards a more participative fathering discourse and practice since these studies were carried out. Future research on fathering and school leadership could offer valuable insights into combining parenting and headship and the value of parenting in establishing more family-friendly practices in schools and a better work-life balance for all staff.

Final Conclusions

My study set out to recruit a small group of women head and executive headteachers to conduct a preliminary study on how women navigate school leadership whilst mothering dependent-aged children. I have succeeded in conducting a study that provides a knowledge base that significantly foregrounds the opportunities and rewards for women of top leadership roles and the potentiality of motherhood. Gender in educational leadership has predominantly focused on the barriers facing women's career advancement, with motherhood being positioned as one of the impediments

(Coleman, 2022; Moorosi, 2019). Perhaps no longer 'reluctant' but 'revolutionaries' (Glenday & Price, 1974); nonetheless, women leaders in my study strive for an egalitarian and diverse society that benefits their own children and the school communities they serve.

The opportunities and rewards of headship motivate participating women to enact their leadership and mothering roles with a sense of fulfilment. The rewards of their leadership role strongly influence their perceptions of their work-life balance and serve to minimise a discursive internal struggle related to maternal guilt. Rather than headship and mothering being incompatible, my study demonstrates ways they can enrich each other. Mothering can empower women, informing the vision of their schools and positively influencing their relationships with staff and parents to strengthen the enactment of their leadership. On the other hand, headship enriches women's mothering by establishing a positive role model, which enables their children to deconstruct gender stereotypes and secures financial stability for their families.

Drawing upon their experiences of mothering, women leaders in my study challenge neoliberal constructions of leadership. Instead, they construct their leadership with the theoretical models of leadership for social justice and learning, suggesting ways of leading to retain and develop staff. Furthermore, within neoliberal discourse, leadership is defined within masculine constructs, alienating and deterring women from aspiring for headship. My small study of women leading whilst mothering establishes an alternative role model of who should be a leader and how to lead.

Leaders have resisted the main regulatory mechanisms of Intensive mothering by achieving leadership positions and providing positive role models for other mothers. The women have shown how a fluid and flexible construction of gendered parenting can enable women's careers, minimise role conflict and establish for women fulfilling family lives. The support of a partner who resists essentialist gendered norms to participate in child-rearing and shares domestic responsibilities actively enables a work-life balance that creates time for women's career development and quality time with their children. Challenging essentialist gender binaries allows women and men to lead and parent in ways to create a more equitable society.

In conclusion, reflecting on nearly 150 years since nine headmistresses met on December 2nd, 1874, to form the Association of Head Mistresses, much has changed. However, the issue they met to discuss what women "ought to assert and what to surrender" (Glenday & Price, 1974, p. 2) has resonated throughout the gender in educational leadership research (Coleman, 2001; Fuller, 2010; Moorosi, 2019; Smith, 2016; Torrence, et al., 2017). My study contributes to this research by offering rich insights and knowledge for women leaders. Challenging binary essentialist discourses on parenting enables women to assert agency over their mothering and to reframe a construct of parenting that allows active involvement of both parents, extended families and friends. In contrast to previous research, my findings show how women need not surrender their leadership careers to have children (Smith, 2016) or choose not to have children to pursue a leadership career (Coleman, 2011; Smith, 2016). Women can achieve sustainable and fulfilling leadership careers and experiences of mothering.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Email to system leaders outlining the purposes of the study

Dear

I would be delighted in your assistance with my research project on: *Navigating motherhood and headship in 21st century English secondary state-funded schools*. This is an innovative project about how mothers perceive, experience and manage the challenges and opportunities of headship, family and personal lives. The study will gather a new evidence base on women headteachers who are mothers of dependent-aged children, these are a cohort of leaders that remain rarely considered within academic research. The rich narratives provided by participants about their personal/family lives, professional experience of school leadership and their daily routines will inform aspiring and current women headteachers, policy leaders and practice leaders. The evidence gathered and analysed throughout the study aims to provide the foundation for policy and practice recommendations to improve access to headship for mothers of dependent-aged children and so, in turn, address the under-representation of women headteachers in English secondary schools.

The timing of the study is important as the system is facing challenges in recruiting headteachers. The current evidence suggests that women with dependent children, unlike men, have not accelerated progress to headship. In addition, the figures released for the last tax year have showed a considerable gender pay gap in education, which further highlights the under-representation of women in senior positions. The debate around the gender pay gap has highlighted how men can experience a 'fatherhood bonus' in terms of career progression. In contrast, women are more likely to experience a penalty for having children (Observer, 11th March 2018). My previous research on the Young Global City Leaders project (gtr.rcuk.ac.uk) evidenced that perceived challenges of managing headship and motherhood deterred young women senior leaders from applying for headship. The purpose of the study is to provide an evidence base to change perceptions, practice and policy.

As an experienced senior leader in secondary schools and a researcher at UCL, I am in a strong position to produce a rigorous and instrumental study. I am reaching out to you as I know that you are committed to supporting the next generation of school leaders and have a wide-reaching professional and personal network, which includes many women headteachers. I would be grateful if I could send the standardised email and attached information letter detailing more about the research to women secondary headteachers in your network to request participation in the project. I have attached copies of both for your information.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this email, and I look forward to hearing from you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further details.

Regards, Juliet Horton

Vice Principal, PhD student UCL

Appendix 2: Letter outlining the study

I would be delighted if you would participate in my research project on: *Navigating motherhood and headship in 21st century English secondary state-funded schools*. This is an innovative project about how mothers perceive, experience and manage the challenges and opportunities of headship, family and personal lives. The study will gather a new evidence base on women headteachers who are mothers of dependent-aged children, these are a cohort of leaders that remain rarely considered within academic research. The rich narratives provided by participants about their personal/family lives, professional experience of school leadership and their daily routines will inform aspiring and current women headteachers, policy leaders and practice leaders. The evidence gathered and analysed throughout the study aims to provide the foundation for policy and practice recommendations to improve access to headship for mothers of dependent-aged children and so, in turn, address the under-representation of women headteachers in English secondary schools.

The timing of this research is highly significant because, despite the increasing number of women senior leaders in state-funded English secondary schools, women continue to be underrepresented in headship (Early and Higham et al., 2012; Fuller, 2013). Research has shown that at the current rate of change, women's representation in headship will not equal their representation in the teaching workforce until after 2040 (Fuller, 2017). There is a significant gap between the proportion of women teachers and the proportion of women headteachers (DfE, 2014; Fuller, 2013). Women are even more severely underrepresented at executive headteacher level (Fuller, 2017). The under-representation of women is a matter of social injustice (Blackmore, 2013) and exposes the urgent need for this research.

I would like to meet with you to conduct an interview at a mutually convenient time, date and location. The interview will last for 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any stage of the research. I will not disclose your participation. All data and information gathered will remain anonymous, and no connection between the school, the individual and the opinion will be made in the study. The transcription of the main themes of the interview will be returned to you for checking. All field notes and interview transcriptions will be destroyed six months after the study has been completed. A summary of the key findings will be sent to you, and a completed copy of the study will be available from the library at the Institute of Education.

By participating in this research, you will be contributing to an important and ground-breaking study on the opportunities and challenges of combining motherhood and headship.

If you agree to participate in the study, please sign below. I appreciate your time and willingness to contribute.

Yours sincerely
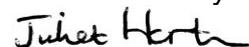
Juliet Horton

Juliet Horton

PhD student UCL, Vice Principal

Appendix 3: Email sent to the CEOs of MAT

I am working as a full-time senior leader in a Multi-academy Trust whilst studying for a PhD at UCL. I would be delighted in your assistance with my research project on: *Navigating motherhood and headship in 21st century English secondary state-funded schools.* This is an innovative project about how mothers perceive, experience and manage the challenges and opportunities of headship, family and personal lives. The study will gather a new evidence base on women headteachers who are mothers of dependent-aged children, these are a cohort of leaders that remain rarely considered within academic research. The rich narratives provided by participants about their personal/family lives, professional experience of school leadership and their daily routines will inform aspiring and current women headteachers, policy leaders and practice leaders. The evidence gathered and analysed throughout the study aims to provide the foundation for policy and practice recommendations to improve access to headship for mothers of dependent-aged children and so, in turn, address the under-representation of women headteachers in English secondary schools.

The timing of the study is important as the system is facing challenges in the recruitment of headteachers. The current evidence suggests that women with dependent children, unlike men, have not accelerated progress to headship. In addition, the figures released for the last tax year have showed a considerable gender pay gap in education, which further highlights the under-representation of women in senior positions. The debate around the gender pay gap has highlighted how men can experience a 'fatherhood bonus' in terms of career progression. In contrast, women are more likely to experience a penalty for having children (Observer, 11th March 2018). My previous research on the Young Global City Leaders project (gtr.rcuk.ac.uk) evidenced that perceived challenges of managing headship and motherhood deterred young women senior leaders from applying for headship. The purpose of the study is to provide an evidence base to change perceptions, practice and policy.

As an experienced senior leader in secondary school schools and a researcher at UCL, I am in a strong position to produce a rigorous and instrumental study. I am reaching out to you as I know that you are committed to supporting the next generation of school leaders and have a wide-reaching professional and personal network, which includes many women headteachers.

I would be grateful if I could send the standardised email and attached information letter detailing more about the research to women secondary headteachers in the Multi-academy Trust to request participation in the project. I have attached copies of both for your information.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this email, and I look forward to hearing from you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further details.

Regards, Juliet Horton

Vice Principal, PhD student UCL.

Appendix 4: Email to leaders requesting participation

Dear

I would be delighted if you would participate in my research project on: *Navigating motherhood and headship in 21st century English secondary state-funded schools*. This is an innovative project about how mothers perceive, experience and manage the challenges and opportunities of headship, family and personal lives. The study will gather a new evidence base on women headteachers who are mothers of dependent-aged children, these are a cohort of leaders that remain rarely considered within academic research. The rich narratives provided by participants about their personal/family lives, professional experience of school leadership and their daily routines will inform and inspire aspiring and current women headteachers. The evidence gathered and analysed throughout the study aims to provide the foundation for policy and practice recommendations to improve access to headship for mothers of dependent-aged children and so, in turn, address the under-representation of women headteachers in English secondary schools.

As an experienced senior leader in secondary schools, a mother and a researcher at UCL, I am in a strong position to produce a rigorous and instrumental study. I am reaching out to you because it is important to share your achievements and experiences; as a headteacher and mother, you are able to offer unique insights and practical strategies to inspire women to strive for headship and inform future practice and policy.

For further information, I have attached an information letter. If you would like to participate, please email me at my UCL email address (j.horton.14@ucl.ac.uk) to arrange a mutually convenient time and place for the interview. I am willing to conduct interviews either in person, via Skype or by telephone. Thank you very much for taking the time to read this email, and I look forward to hearing from you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further details.

Thank you very much for your support

Regards, Juliet Horton
Vice Principal, PhD student UCL.

Appendix 5: Tweets

9:55
21/02/2019
72 retweets, 8 Quote retweets 44 likes
I am looking for participants to take part in my PhD study: Navigating #motherhoodand #headship in English #secndary #statefunded schools. Interested? Know someone? Retweet & contact me via Twitter on j.horton.14@ucl.ac.uk

13:16
01/06/2019
Thank you to all the support so far – last pitch for participants for my PhD study: navigating #motherhood &#headship in #secondary state-funded schools! Interested? Know someone? Retweet and contact me via Twitter or j.horton.14@ucl.ac.uk @womeEdSE @maternityCPD
34 Retweets, 2 Quote tweets, 24 likes

Appendix 6: Standard email

Standard email asking the leader to suggest dates and times.

Juliet <j.horton.14@ucl.ac.uk> wrote:
Dear
Thank you very much for agreeing to be involved. I attach a letter which includes further information. Please email me some dates and times you would be available for an interview. The interview will take between 45 minutes and an hour, and I am happy to conduct it over the phone or in person.

Please don't hesitate to ask if you have any further questions.

Best wishes, Juliet

Appendix 7: Consent form

I agree to participate in an interview for this research project to understand more about how mothers perceive, experience and manage the challenges and opportunities of headship, family and personal lives.

- I have been informed of the research and why it is taking place
- I understand that my participation is voluntary
- I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time
- I understand that my data will be anonymous
- I understand that I will be provided with a summary of the key findings of the research.
- I have retained a copy of this letter for my files.

Signature_____

Date _____

Appendix 8: Interview tool

Career

1. What have been your leadership experiences prior to senior leadership?
2. What have been the critical points in your career?
3. How important has the support of mentors and networks been in supporting your career?
4. What have been the factors that have influenced your aspirations for headship?
5. Has your family life influenced your career trajectory, and if so, how?
6. What are the opportunities and challenges of headship?
7. What do you see as the next steps in your career? How far does your family affect your decision-making?
8. Have you faced professional or personal challenges in becoming a headteacher? What were they? How did you overcome them?
9. What makes leadership challenging?
10. Have there been any decision points in your career/ personal life that have had an effect on your career decisions? If so, what? Why? What changed?
11. What support helps you to be an effective leader? At work? At home? Local level? National level?
12. What kind of mentoring would you benefit from?
13. What kind of networking opportunities would you like?

Motherhood

1. How does being a headteacher affect your personal/family lives?
2. Are you the main breadwinner? How does that make you feel?
3. Did you take maternity leave? If so, how long? Did your partner take any parental leave?
4. How is the responsibility for domestic duties divided?
5. How are 'caring' (children/family) responsibilities managed?
6. How close do you live to your family? How supportive are they? What do they do to support you?
7. What other support structures do you have in place out of school?
8. How important is a work-life balance? What is your ideal balance? How close are you to achieving it?
9. What support/strategies help to establish a healthy work-life balance?
10. Does being a parent and a headteacher put additional pressure on your time?
11. Do you have rules to divide work from home?
12. Do you have a personal and a work phone? Do you have your work email on your phone?
13. Describe a typical day.
   What time do you get up? Who wakes the children and prepares them for nursery/school? How do you travel to work? How do you use the journey? Who drops the pupils at nursery/school? What do you do when you arrive at work? What time do you leave? Who picks the children up? What do you do when you get home? Who cooks dinner? What do you do when the children go to bed?

Motherhood and Leadership

1. How does your personal/family life affect your professional life as a headteacher?

2. How does being a headteacher affect your personal/family life?
3. Were you a mother when you became a headteacher? If not, how did perceptions of you as a leader change when you became one?
4. Do you think being a mother influences the way your colleagues, students and parents perceive you?
5. How have you combined/blended the identities/roles of motherhood and school leader? What are the opportunities and the challenges?
6. Have there been occasions when being a mother has affected how others have responded to you as a leader? If so, how have you dealt with them?
7. What would you say to a woman teacher who intends to be a headteacher and has young children/wishes to start a family?

Appendix 9: Data Analysis Coding

A section from a transcript shows the application of coding predominantly, but not exclusively, on the professional support and barriers faced prior to headship.

Theme	Sub-themes
Professional factors that support career advancement	Senior Team experience
	Headteacher mentoring
	Women Leadership Role Models
	Mentors and Networks: Informal Formal
	Fast Track Leadership Programmes
Professional Barriers	School organisational structures
	Prejudice
	Lack of Formal mentoring

J – How important has the support of mentors and networks been in supporting your career?

I – SUPPORT: INFORMAL MENTORING - Yes, it's been quite informal from time to time. One of my first colleagues when I worked as the Head of Department for my promotion really, was an ex Primary Head Teacher who had gone in for lecturing and he was fantastic, helped me realise where I should be going and what I could be doing and all of that. It's been very informal but some very very good friends with teachers, we've all supported each other and stuck by each other.

BARRIERS: LACK OF FORMAL MENTORING - I haven't formally had mentors until I worked with somebody who actually runs a project management company as my mentor and coach in my last Headship. VALUE OF FORMAL MENTORING And that was fantastic; to actually to make sure that you synch well. I coach now, mentor and coach, a lot of women. It wasn't readily available at the time because of that I do it now because I just think it makes such a massive difference on the whole, getting everything in perspective of what you can and can't do. I think I would have benefited enormously from that a lot earlier, and WOMEN ROLE MODELS for it to be a supportive women's network as well.

J - What factors influenced your aspirations for Headship?

I – LACK OF ASPIRATION EARLY IN CAREER Well, I never was going to be a Headteacher. I thought I'd probably be a Deputy Headteacher. SUPPORT: SENIOR TEAM EXPERIENCE / ALTURUISTIC MOTIVATIONS When I became a deputy Headteacher, I could see there was a different way of leading. I don't think we need to have this sort of bravado, macho, form of leadership. I think actually we can lead more kindly with more heart I suppose and be individually practiced based rather than try to lump everybody into a mold. So that drove me, quite a lot to see, we can do things differently with a focus on what matters and what matters is kids' well-being and staff well-being really rather than being schools which change all the time, and shoving everybody through the sausage machine. I think I probably reached that point in my previous school there, thinking, "This isn't right. We can't keep doing this to people."

J – Has your family life influenced your career trajectory? And if so, how?

I – WORK-LIFE BALANCE: IMPORTANCE OF RULES Because it's just me you have to be very regimented so probably a lot of my life suffered rather than a lot of their life suffering to be very regimented to make sure that we're all home at whatever time, spend incomes, and amending work afterwards. CHALLENGES TO FAMILY: TIME AWAY FROM FAMILY When my youngest daughter was young she was fed up with me one day and said that, "If you won't do as I ask you to I won't let you do your marking!" (laughs) OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY: ROLE MODEL FOR CHILDREN They're desperately proud of me now. I have two sons and two daughters and definitely the daughters are desperately proud of me now. CHALLENGES: SACRIFICE But I think at the time it was things are sacrificed. BARRIERS: SCHOOL ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES So it's hard because I was working for a Headteacher who wouldn't let you have the time with your family and that was one of the things that I was really keen on wouldn't be replicated. For example, we were meant to be having a family celebration, my daughter who remembers this very vividly; we had a meeting, a very late meeting, it was my daughter's birthday, and I was told I could either go home straight off after school and come back for the very late meeting, or do the meeting after school and then not go so very late meeting. And that was it. There was no, "Of course, family's first." So it has suffered. I'm sure.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY: HOLIDAYS The good thing about it was of course school holidays. I was able to be with them I think that did compensate in terms of how we spent time. INFLUENCE OF FAMILY ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: STAFF WELLBEING /WORKLIFE-BALANCE My experiences have taught me that it isn't right, you know. I feel that something needs to be said about it. We need to be finding different ways for men as well as women really because if we're working with kids we should be supporting our colleague's children just as much as our children in the classroom. I think we've got to move away from. "I've done 80 hours this week. How many hours have you done?" philosophy. Because I think it makes us all ill, doesn't it?

J – I agree.

Have you faced any challenges in becoming a Head teacher, and if so what?

I – BARRIERS: PREJUDICE My last school was a very complacent school. People were very reluctant to change. And part of that huge reluctance to change was projected onto a huge reluctance to listen to a woman. And I did have quite a lot of aggressive and sexist behaviour from some staff members who thought if they kept pushing me I'd give up and let them do what they wanted. And I think you overcome that just try to keep yourself going in the right direction. ALTRUISTIC MOTIVATIONS Speaking now, now about things not being right making sure you've got a massive moral purpose so you understand why you're doing it, even when it's tough. Those days are hard. And I feel that women Head teachers face them much more than men. And I think we hear about mental health at the moment and about women talking out about it which means it's starting to be taken credibly but I actually think there's a massive undercurrent of enormous sexism from all sorts of people about female Head teachers still.