

# Female Headship and Life History Research: Using Emotional Turning Points

Joanne Cliffe

School of Education, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

Email: [j.e.cliffe@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.e.cliffe@bham.ac.uk)

**How to cite this paper:** Cliffe, J. (2016). Female Headship and Life History Research: Using Emotional Turning Points. *Creative Education*, 7, 2774-2790.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ce.2016.718258>

**Received:** October 18, 2016

**Accepted:** December 12, 2016

**Published:** December 15, 2016

Copyright © 2016 by author and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

A natural line of enquiry for women studying women's lives is to use life history. Life history helps us to know and understand a subject's identity. It distinguishes what people are "trying to do" and provides a framework to comprehend a person's actions so an individual is a dynamic, rather than reflexive participant in her own life. Life history reflects the lived experience of those being researched as they construct their identity through recounting their stories and gaining a deeper understanding of themselves. This paper draws on stories recounted by female headteachers with an emphasis on the rich tapestry of their life experiences and their associated learning through positive and/or negative events. It is the outcomes of these events where the focus lies; particularly how the headteachers made effective use of emotional "turning points" in their lives. Their subsequent actions provide insight and possible contributions to future headship preparation programmes. Findings from two studies provide the data from which the paper is based. The first explored the career paths of seven female secondary school headteachers making sole use of life history interviews; the second was a through five-year longitudinal investigation of another seven secondary school female headteachers with a focus on emotional intelligence which used a range of methods, including life history interviews and psychometric tests (including emotional intelligence tests).

## Keywords

Life History, Headteacher, Female Headteachers, School Leadership, Emotions, Emotional Intelligence, Turning Points

---

## 1. Introduction

In the quest to find phenomenon in relation to an investigation into female secondary headteachers and emotional intelligence, it emerged that the act of conducting the re-

search had an impact on the findings. Through life history research, the experiences and stories shared gave insight to emotional turning points which contributed to the women's decision making on their journeys to headship and whilst in post as secondary school leaders. Reciprocally, the stories and experiences recounted by the respondents have in turn, informed their life history. This paper explores how life history as a research tool gets to the heart of the researched.

## 2. The Research Method

The information incorporated in this paper has been generated through two investigations. The first set out to explore the career paths of women who had reached the position of secondary school headship with a particular focus on breaking through the glass ceiling (Hall, 1996). The second study focused on the concept of emotional intelligence and correlations, if any, to female secondary school leadership (Cliffe, 2011). Each investigation was based on a sample of seven headteachers from different authorities and different types of schools across England, so in all a total of 14 women. From the first investigation the women described themselves as White British, aged 35 to 62 and from the second, the women described themselves as White British or Asian British, aged 32 to 64. The institutions represented a variety of age ranges of children from 11 - 16, 11 - 18 and 14 - 19 and co-educational settings as well as single sex girls' and boys' schools. The sample size of both investigations was small thus generating findings of interest contributing to the field of female school leadership rather than making claims towards generalisation.

The time-scale for data collection was over one year for the first study and over a six year period for the second. The approaches for the investigations were different. The first relied solely on two semi-structured interviews per headteacher, whereas the second investigation utilized a number of research tools which encompassed questionnaires including the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, known as the "MSCEIT" (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2006) and the "EQ Map" (Q-Metrics, 1996/1997, 2006) as well as featuring two semi-structured interviews. The information presented here is drawn entirely from interviews designed to explore life history. The approach seemed fitting when investigating the headteachers' lives and in particular the steps they had taken towards their goals and an ideal medium for presenting their points of view (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Therefore with the research focused on the spoken narrative to "get closer to minds" (Hodder, 1994: p. 384), it was important to give due care and attention to ethical considerations. These included informed consent, confidentiality and accuracy (Christians, 2005). Efforts were taken to avoid misinterpretation along with protection of the headteachers' and their schools' identities to avoid "unwanted exposure" (Christians, 2005: p. 145). Therefore to address the implications of privacy and confidentiality, all subjects remain anonymous and are given pseudonyms. Quotations from the first investigation are from Carol, Jane and Liz and from the second are Emma, Mandy, Sue and Vicki. Whilst the headteachers from both studies recounted numerous emotional turning points, the focus here is on those which have

been allied to possibly discriminatory rejections, although most subjects claimed they did not experience discrimination.

### 3. Women Researching Women through Life History

Life history as a qualitative approach to research is considered as a natural line of enquiry, where women often use life history to study women's lives (Chase, 2005). The interest lies in women being social actors in their own right and in making sense of subjective meanings which are assigned to events and conditions in their lives. In addition, the female researcher often addresses *her* subjectivity during the interactions and relationships which develop with the researched. Indeed, Cooper & Sawaf (1997: pp. 204-205) refer to life history as “[t]he [life] stories about who we are, what we stand for, and what we may yet become”. It is the stories which help to generate understanding of others' lives (Coles, 1989). The life-story is connected to the individual, what has happened to her, what she has experienced and construed and, what she is able to express by recounting to others. Researchers aim to use life history to gather information regarding a person's experience in order to connect the reality of life in which the individual has lived, along with phrasing possibilities she is yet to explore (Antikainen et al., 1996).

To know and understand a subject's identity is to reveal “the figure under the carpet” Edel (1979: p. 16). In getting to understand this figure requires ascertaining an individual's inner world as she retrospectively attaches meanings to her former experiences (Cliffe, 2012). For this to happen there needs to be a mutual, trusting relationship between the researcher and the researched where individual personality and social behaviour interplay so that “people are active rather than passive participants in their own lives” (Zirkel, 2000: p. 4). Thus connecting with Chase's (2005: p. 657) notion that “narratives as verbal action-as doing or accomplishing something ... when someone tells a story he or she shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience, and reality”. Hence for the purposes of this paper, the life stories reflect the lived experience of the headteachers, which in turn will inform their life history. However, whilst setting out to understand the experiences as explained to me, it is worth noting the arguments from Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000: pp. 212-213) who point out “the risk is great that research which concentrates on ‘the concrete and shared experiences’ of women will have a limited agenda”. Despite this acknowledgement, recent contributions to the field of women researching female school leaders include Fuller (2009: p. 19) who despite reporting the under representation of females in secondary school headship positions in England and Wales, found female secondary headteachers to be “alive and well in Birmingham [UK]”. On the career paths of South African female principals, Moorosi (2010: p. 547) identified three stages of “anticipation, acquisition and performance” on route to leadership roles. Investigating barriers to progression to principalship for women in Ohio, USA resulted in identification of two obstacles being “gender stereotypical views, followed by family responsibilities” as reported by Pirouznia (2013: p. 300). Further, engaging life history studies by Smith (2011a, 2011b) detail the career trajectories of fe-

male teachers and their aspirations, or not, to take on headteacher roles.

#### 4. Emotions

Given that this research focused on the emotional aspect of real stories, it is necessary to describe the emotional landscape. Emotions affect the way people perceive themselves, others and situations and, the actions that they subsequently take (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). It is difficult to pin down a definitive definition of emotion or emotions, yet we are able to recognise them in ourselves or others (Saarni, 2000; Russell & Barchard, 2002; Cliffe, 2008). Emotions are mostly “*directed at or are about something*” (Russell & Barchard, 2002: p. 365, emphasis in the original). The reasons for emotions are vast and complex and can include cognitive, sensory and perceptual properties. These, singularly or collectively can result in, or contribute to emotional behaviour or emotional episodes. An understanding of emotion aids comprehension of emotional intelligence.

#### 5. Emotional Intelligence

Much has been written about emotional intelligence in the last twenty years. Definitions invariably include having emotional states to methods of dealing with emotions or emotional states such as Goleman’s (1998) adaptation of Mayer & Salovey’s (1997) work in presenting five domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and having social skills. Predominantly, the various definitions and explanations of emotional intelligence appear to encompass long lists of personal attributes. Inevitably this leads to flaws in the concept in that it “is not as simple as the one variable fits all” (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000: p. 103). In essence, having emotional intelligence leads to the notion that everyone can be aware of and take the necessary steps to improve their own emotional competence. Saarni (2000: p. 68), emphasis in the original) describes emotional competence as “the demonstration of self-efficacy in emotion-eliciting social transactions. Self-efficacy is used here to mean that the individual believes that he or she has the capacity and skills to achieve a desired outcome”. Here, desired outcomes are what an individual believes, this draws upon the importance of cultural awareness and in turn one’s “moral commitments”. Emotional competence can be accomplished by “having emotion ... conceptualising emotion ... becoming meta-aware of emotion, and ... regulating emotion” (Russell & Barchard, 2002: p. 372).

Whilst it was intended to explore the correlation of emotional intelligence and female school leadership in the second investigation, the prominence on this aspect occurred after data collection from the first set of semi structured interviews, where the emphasis shifted from emotional intelligence to “using emotional information intelligently” (Cliffe, 2011); thus demonstrating emotional competence, particularly in regard to personal behaviour and decision making.

For the purposes of this paper, the focus is on emotional issues and the reported actions that came from the feelings (I argue that feelings and emotions are inextricably linked, Cliffe, 2008) the respondents identified at various stages of their career paths to

headship, or once they were in post. These were all reported as incidents which proved to be turning points for them.

## 6. Emotional Turning Points

The process of leading requires engaging and encouraging others to carry out their duties effectively. To be an effective leader, there is a need to clearly understand “the diverse network of people around you” (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997: p. 205). The stories that were shared by the headteachers demonstrated that they were very aware of those around them. They appeared to be able to handle their own and others’ emotions and were on many occasions able to respond in emotionally intelligent ways to a variety of situations.

Through their stories they made references to events in their lives, some of which were turning points for them. A turning point being the phrase used to describe a situation, whether it be an incident or conversation that releases a trigger to initiate a response which is often performed subconsciously. The turning point tends to be revealed when reflecting back at a particular time. The different ways in which the women reacted to their turning points revealed they were able to reflect and learn, meaning that on another occasion, they might handle things or people differently (Cliffe, 2008). The information relating to turning points presented in the findings in this paper was offered by respondents during their interviews. It is important to note that the term “turning points” came from them; prompts for turning points in the interviews were not used. It is also imperative to affirm the demeanour of the respondents who were calm and spoke freely in their interviews. Whilst they discussed situations in their past which had made some of them angry, frustrated, irritated or annoyed, they did not display such traits in their narratives.

It is clear that emotional management is an important factor in being a headteacher. Indeed emotional aspects have crept into leadership preparation programmes (Beatty, 2005; Morrison & Ecclestone, 2011). In addition, on researching headteachers’ emotions Crawford (2009: p. 2, 148) describes headship as “a complex synergy of emotion and leadership” and calls for “more work into the connections between leadership, emotion and the headteacher’s life story”. Such connections are explored in the findings.

## 7. The Findings

In getting to know “the figure under the carpet” (Edel, 1979), the following sections illustrate and comment upon some of the reported turning points which impacted on the lives of the headteachers.

### 7.1. Turning Points

Jane was acting deputy head and when the time came for her to apply to make the position permanent she was unsuccessful. She recalled her interview and in doing so she was very firm in putting across her feelings of being angry coupled with feelings of disappointment; she thought she was the better choice for the school based on her percep-

tion of the successful candidate. This prompted her to seek employment immediately elsewhere. She described this as her turning point. Jane's experience is similar to the headteachers reported in Blackmore's (1999: p. 76) study, she found that "many applied for promotion out of anger and frustration when they saw less qualified and capable men rapidly move up the school hierarchy" and thought "I can do better than that".

I was interviewed for the deputy headship and I didn't get it and that was the first disappointment I'd had in my career. The first time I didn't get a job. It made me quite cross. It made me even crosser when I saw the person who did get it doing it badly. So I immediately applied for deputy headships (Jane).

Jane was able to describe how people operated around her (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997); getting angry about her situation triggered her subsequent actions. Another example is that reported by Sue.

The head of humanities post came up and I went for that [it] was an internal post at the school and external as well and I didn't get it and I was quite shocked by it, the first job I didn't get. [I was] really angry, angry with the head partly because I felt that the person who was appointed had less experience and knew less about the job than I did ... I was then contacted by a councillor and asked if I wanted to do this advisory role and I said yes immediately (Sue).

Sue talked about this experience as suffering a setback; she had failed to secure an internal promotion. The reason for applying for an internal role was because Sue felt that she could not consider moving schools or even to another geographical area because she had just returned after her first maternity leave. Sue left the school and became an advisor to heads of faculties. She said that her experience of rejection had made her determined because she had "not achieved what she had gone for and she found it such a monumental blow to her ego, she wanted to show what she could actually achieve". Sue's response exemplifies the sociological approach to life history, as her dialogue is focused towards characteristics of her life events as opposed to describing organisational contexts (Chase, 2005). In addition, both Jane and Sue's turning points resonate with Smith's (2011a: p. 13) type of "protester" where the experience of anger accompanies an awareness of discrimination which ignites self-motivation.

The same could be true for Mandy. She expressed her feelings towards her circumstances which were a couple of similar experiences. The first was an internal promotion in her first school. She had already secured promotions and was shocked to be turned down for her next, she commented she lost out to "an Asian man and I think there was a lot of politicking going on, so he got the internal post that I wanted, I wasn't happy about that". Mandy continued "he didn't stay for very long actually. I don't think he enjoyed it. I don't think he was ever up to it where I think I was. So I think at that point, you start to look about, just start with the trigger". This was Mandy's first emotional turning point; her second was when her family responsibilities were called into question. Timpano & Knight (1976) documented family responsibilities as discriminatory. Mandy, whilst in her role as second in science, thought that she had made a considera-

ble contribution to improving the department. She took a short maternity leave to have her first child; on her return the headteacher told her “we had such great hopes for you”. Mandy maintains that neither her attitude nor her ability to do the job had changed but reported “the perception of [her] had changed in their eyes because [she] had a child”. Pirouznia (2013: p. 306) reports this as an employers’ view, where “employers perceive women leaders as confronting a conflict of loyalty between home and work, they assume that these women, regardless of their circumstances, lack the commitment required of the “ideal leader”, and thus they exclude women as candidates for positions structured for such leaders”. Mandy’s reaction and subsequent action fits Derrida’s (1981: p. 29) “conscious and speaking subject”, through her demonstrating her rational mind and pragmatic approach to her role.

It was right at the start of her second headship where Vicki was able to reflect back and share similar discriminatory stories in relation to her career path. She encountered what she termed were comments from the “old brigade” which she claimed were turning points for her in how she wanted to be perceived by her staff, which was as a “straight talker”. New in post, Vicki explained that as she walked down the corridor, one of her science teachers went past and said to her “try that one”; she said he aimed his derogatory remark directly at her. Vicki elaborated “it was a deliberate attempt to undermine, it was totally sexist, you should never let it go, the minute you let it go once, you’ve had it. So it had to be challenged, that’s very hard to do but it has to be done”. She was adamant that she was going to confront the situation and described that although a difficult issue she tackled it head on. She let a little time pass and then called for the teacher where she says that she told him he needed to change his attitude. Within days, she had to deal with another similar experience which she tackled immediately, there and then on the corridor.

I’ve got one science technician who will avoid being in the same corridor as me because he’s so embarrassed about my asking him why he felt it necessary to wink at me as I walked down the corridor. He said “well I just” I said, “well, what were you doing? Share it with me because I don’t understand it” and we had that sort of dialogue. He went to pieces and he said crossly that I was embarrassing him (Vicki).

Vicki demonstrated “feeling and reason”, but rather than being driven by one more than the other, it appears her “feelings” regarding the incidents triggered her to act with reason (McAfee, 2004). Vicki claimed these two incidents were turning points for her being new in post; it set the scene for the rest of her time as headteacher at the school. She asserted “they know I mean business, in school, what you see is what you get, I take no nonsense”. She referred that some might talk behind closed doors and call her bossy, just as another respondent had claimed.

## **7.2. Women as Secondary School Leaders**

Carol, described how she thought headteachers were given different labels, she described a local headteacher with whom she worked closely as being assertive and

claimed she thought their style of leading was similar, yet it frustrated her that they were given different labels.

I've been described as "bossy", typical isn't it, the head down the road is known for his assertive ways, yet I'm the "pushy female" ... I don't know how we are ever going to overcome this (Carol).

Whilst Carol and Vicki were described as bossy, the term was used on several occasions by the headteachers in reference to themselves. If this idiom were interpreted in a semiotic fashion, by taking *bossy* as the signifier and *leadership* as the signified concept, it could indicate that the headteachers may have been prone to be functioning via conditioned responses perhaps by operating in a controlling or autocratic manner as a leader. These leadership styles could indicate the headteachers had in fact adopted masculine approaches to leadership (Cunnison, 1985; Spencer & Podmore, 1987; Blackmore, 1989; Gray, 1989, 1993; Coleman, 1996). Taken in isolation, the description of "bossy" has become a male term for "assertive" females (Sheldon, 1997; Babcock & Laschever, 2003) and furthermore, both Carol and Vicki notably appear to have internalised this description of themselves.

Carol acknowledged that early on in her headship, she had to take a stand for what she believed in, for how she wanted to run her school. She said

to put my finger on it, it was when a workman came into school and said to me "where's the bossman" "what do you mean?" I replied. "Him the eddmaster", "well I'm the headmistress you can talk to me".

Carol was then at pains to say, "oh that's done it" another label and she laughed at how she used the title headmistress just to wind people up. Carol's responses echoed Zirkel's (2000) comments regarding understanding an individual's behaviour in striving towards her goals. Furthermore, such social exchanges bring symbolic meaning (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000) and shape character.

Emma responded that she had several labels as she talked about the nature of her role. Emma declared that her experiences had led her to alter her image to suit a situation and she described her job as an act, she argued that she could hide her worries and insecurities.

It's acting all day long and being the appropriate face at any moment ... being a teacher, a social worker, a business manager, an accountant, a diplomat ... some days I might as well go and get a job in the United Nations ... you've dealt with 14 different crises and you think, 'I've got to go home now and pick up the row we had at breakfast'.

Here, Emma has to make sense of it all adopting apposite behaviour to suit the circumstances. She manages the complexities of her social encounters (Saussure, 1916) when performing her role.

Liz complained about the barriers or blocks facing her in applying for headship. After being given what she termed the "green light" and positive support from one educa-



tional authority, she was disappointed to find she was no longer in a favourable position after she had relocated to another geographical area. No references were requested for any of the headteacher positions she applied for. She embarked on a Master's degree and continued to apply for a headship. In desperation she sought advice from her previous employer, she asked "I can't believe this, I'm not getting anywhere with this, what shall I do?" Her previous local authority officer and others with whom she had been networking started making enquiries as to why Liz was unsuccessful. She was told "Oh, this is the north, you don't expect to walk into a headship up here do you as a woman, you've got to be joking". Liz was advised to consider a deputy head's position first in order to be considered for a headship. This she did and was successful. After four years she was invited to apply for headships by officers who had previously rejected her for "being too young at 34 and too risky". Whilst Liz's experience resonated with [Shake-shaft's \(1993\)](#) research on negative attitudes and discriminatory actions, Liz recalled that this was her emotional turning point which made her more determined to pursue her goal. Liz articulated descriptions about her experiences and feelings which contributed to the understanding of her life history ([Antikainen et al., 1996](#)) although, as with all subjects in this paper, she retrospectively attached meaning to her life story via the interplay of symbols and language ([Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000](#); [Cliffe, 2012](#)).

### 7.3. Women Researching Women

When analysing the occurrence of these and other turning points as well as the respondents' subsequent actions it seemed appropriate to explore emerging patterns. In particular, how the respondents reacted to events at certain phases in their careers and whether the respondents 'fitted' any existing model thus seeking to make sense of subjective meanings ([Chase, 2005](#)). It appeared that it was possible to align the responses to the model devised by [Coleman \(2002\)](#) summarising a career path, with all headteachers outlining their experiences identified as preparation, establishment, advancement or development, acquisition and performance. The typologies describing females and their approaches to their careers devised by [Smith \(2011a\)](#) has relevance, as previously noted in relation to "protestors". In addition, [Hall's \(1996: p. 47\)](#) reference to [Evetts' \(1990: p. 40\)](#) recognisable stages relating to both career and private life were identifiable.

Despite outlining [Evetts' \(1990\)](#) career types, [Hall \(1996: pp. 46-48\)](#) acknowledged "[w]omen's careers ... switch back and forth between the options as their personal circumstances change". She identified such "typologies acknowledge the possibility of changes in orientation over time. They depend on women identifying retrospectively what had priority at different stages of their lives". In addition, in investigating careers, it is possible that the researcher's personal biography creeps into the agenda ([Carspecken, 1996](#)), where she identifies her own experiences in relation to devising a model.

Indeed, [Hall \(1993: p. 37\)](#) identified how "life history research confirms that women's different life experiences will influence their performance". The life history interviews allowed the respondents to reflect upon the experiences in their own lives. The head-

teachers' stories often related to life tasks they encountered on a daily basis which in turn, contributed to their individual experiences. Hedlund & Sternberg (2000: p. 144) pointed out that "there are often problems associated with such life tasks as they provided 'meaning in individuals' lives". They recognised that such problems helped individuals with the organisation of their daily activities and that life tasks included forming relationships, it is often the problems which are the catalysts or turning points for action. This is reflected by Mandy who summarised how she approached her path to headship and how she subsequently carried out her role.

There have been times when I've felt I wasn't helped and possibly hindered for a while ... but I took a stand to go for what I wanted, some experiences have set the trigger for me to take action ... but I've had a fairly easy ride through it really ... you can chose how you react to set backs ... often things challenge you, at work, at home ... it's gone along very smoothly ... most of the time (Mandy).

#### 7.4. Using Emotions Intelligently

Ciarrochi et al. (2001: p. 26) made references to the importance of life events and that these contribute to a person's life history. The headteachers in this study demonstrated how they were able to regulate their stressful experiences and how such experiences enabled them to focus within the workplace, thus they were able to rise above their problems and deal with them appropriately; thus correlating with the claims Ciarrochi et al. (2001) made that the more able a person was to handle their emotions, the more adaptable they would be towards handling negative life outcomes and in fact would probably experience less negative life outcomes because of the way they would lead their lives, particularly when addressing turning points. Jane, Sue, Mandy and Vicki's reported experiences resonate with these notions. Vicki in particular demonstrated her resilience to negative life outcomes. Like Liz, Vicki relocated to 'the north' and faced male 'gatekeepers' (Schmuck, 1986; Coleman, 1996), she explained "the position meant a move to a traditional northern town ... the clerk to the governors ... [revealed that] there was no way they were going to appoint a woman". She said her attitude and response to this "was that if you think I am not good enough for the job ... you better have a jolly good reason why". Vicki was successful.

Ciarrochi et al. (2001) linked the way an individual coped with life events to emotional intelligence. In doing so, they produced a model which captured potential roles of emotional intelligence in everyday life. In addition to explaining how an individual handled negative life outcomes as previously noted, they argued that those with high emotional intelligence would have better coping mechanisms and would have the ability to adapt to any negative life outcomes. Furthermore, they believed such individuals would experience negative events less frequently, as well as them possessing the skills to establish and sustain relationships of high quality. As with previous models, it is possible to map the respondents to this model thus correlating with the life stories of the headteachers. Particularly as the headteachers' identities or their perceptions of their 'self' even as a performer was aligned to their actions. Playing a part as a means to an

end satisfies the self and provides a personal power allowing them to set their agendas and provide direction in their lives. All the headteachers noted at some stage they considered that they were acting, playing a role or putting on a performance as previously articulated by Emma's account. However, the performances were often self-regulatory and were carried out with a certain amount of self-control by making intelligent use of their emotions. Balancing life events and making intelligent use of emotions was summed up by Vicki.

Amongst the teaching profession, relationship breakup is actually rife, stress is rife, ill health is rife and so with all that in mind, I watch my colleagues, I watch other heads looking kind of older and older by the day and tired and stressed and ill; I just don't want to go there. So why go there? I guess I'm going to have to get older but I'm damned if I'm going on my knees ... I retain the ability to switch off and that's what I will do at 7 o'clock tonight ... you need to understand and recognise people's needs to come out in a win, win ... I mean I try and tap into all of their [the staff] needs ... people like me will take stuff they find useful and leave the rest alone (Vicki).

## **8. Female School Leadership, Intelligent Use of Emotions and Life History—A Model**

Throughout the data collection, I built relationships with the interviewees where I devoted time to understand them and I was mindful of their perceptions of the interview process (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997). Listening to and trusting the subjects was paramount. In drawing conclusions (and based on the data from the wider investigations) through these established relationships and use of life history research, it appears that the respondents' experiences resonated with existing models in the field whether based on career pathways or emotional intelligence and life events, including the four noted in this paper (Evetts, 1990; Ciarrochi et al., 2001; Coleman, 2002; Smith, 2011a). In addition, is the notion of the usefulness of being researched in terms of professional and personal development as the respondents retrospectively discussed their career journeys. It is clear that the emotional turning points altered career trajectories.

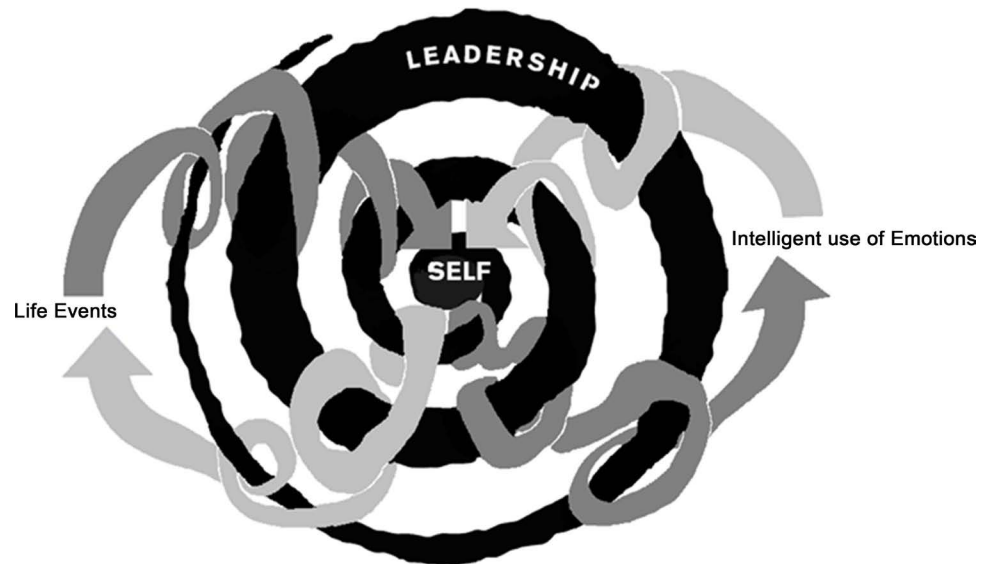
It seemed logical, therefore, to devise a model to illustrate the complex relationship of female school leadership with the intelligent use of emotions at significant turning points in a life history; although it must be acknowledged that the usefulness of using life history could involve women or men. The case for presenting the model for females is due to the under representation of females in secondary school leadership at the time of research and a natural line of enquiry for a female with leadership aspirations to be interested in the career paths of female headteachers. Therefore acquiring an understanding of women's conditions and experiences "to study various phenomena from the perspective of women or from a feminist point of view" promotes the interests of women (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000: p. 212). Drawing on the notion that all research data are constructs of interpretation, Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000: p. 2) posit towards making results meaningful, they take the stance "that empirical social science is very

much less certain and more problematic than common sense or conventional methodological textbooks would have us think”.

In working towards a model, adopting a reflexive stance with the existing writings thus far contributes to how the findings have been communicated and revealed. It is logical therefore, to consider how I interpreted my own perspective and viewed it from the perspective of others “turning a self-critical eye onto my own authority as interpreter and author” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000: p. vii). In particular, was the ongoing concern regarding how the headteachers’ stories were perceived for it could be argued that emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983; Gronn, 2003) played a part in how the respondents desired me *to view them*. For example, the subjects’ awareness of their emotional displays in how they recounted their stories and whether or not they managed these displays by being conscious of ‘how they came across’ during the interview process. Particularly, as the focus was on telling their stories rather than a conversation where I assisted them in developing their analysis. This could be seen as a possible weakness of the approach. The comments shared by Kram & Cherniss (2001: p. 271) who summarised the findings of Levinson et al. (1978) are relevant here; “the concept of the life structure, which embodies the relationships with self, work, family, community, and others that exist for the purpose of creating and realising a life dream” may ring true for many of the respondents.

With so many factors to consider, I suggest that relationships can best be symbolised by a spiral, as illustrated in **Figure 1**. Here, the spiral represents the life journey, starting from the ‘self’; the path then travelled enables an individual to ascend and/or descend through various experiences towards leadership whilst developing and learning from taking actions at their emotional turning points, such as those described by Jane, Sue, Mandy and Vicki. Therefore, the figure represents that knowing how to use emotional turning points comes from the self and goes back to the self through a person’s life history. This relationship influences how an individual goes about their role as a leader and perhaps gives rise to their self-potential, particularly when events or circumstances trigger them to take action to follow a chosen pathway. For example, this was pertinent to Jane and Sue as they reacted to events which prompted them to take action.

The edges of the spiral are deliberately wavy and the arrows are not uniform in order to symbolise that life history is not a smooth path and that experiences from life outcomes and life events help to create knowledge and understanding in handling everyday life experiences. In all, the spiral is a journey of discovery as are some of the stories, which informed how the life history data emerged over quite extended periods of time, hence the process of ageing and its associated experience contributed to the development of the headteachers’ intelligent use of emotions as they reacted to turning points. The spiral as a model encapsulates different approaches to life history research, from constructionalist theories (Smith, 1998; Antikainen et al., 1996) to emotionalist theories (Jaggar, 1989; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Gilbert, 2001) and in a combined sense perhaps resonates with a ‘hermeneutic-phenomenological’ research strategy with human



**Figure 1.** Female school leadership, intelligent use of emotions and life history—a model. The spiral represents an individual’s life journey starting from the self; the path then travelled enables an individual to ascend or descend through life experiences. The arrows represent these life experiences or life events and are fully entwined with the life journey and resultant life history. The arrows also represent intelligent use (or not) of emotions and this starts from and ends at the self.

experience at its heart in a quest to find meaning in a subject’s consciousness.

## 9. Conclusion

When searching for meaning in the headteachers’ stories, their identification of turning points often came about after incidents which had made them angry or, as in Liz’s case, frustrated by not being promoted as quickly as she would have liked. Their subsequent response to their anger and frustration was actively to confront situations.

Therefore, the headteachers demonstrated how they were able to regulate their stressful experiences and how such experiences enabled them to focus within the workplace; they were able to rise above their problems and deal with them appropriately, correlating with the claims Ciarrochi et al. (2001) made that the more able a person is to handle their emotions, the more adaptable they would be towards handling negative life outcomes. It is possible to link a researcher’s emotional stance here: in drawing conclusions from the respondents’ stories, a researcher emotionally as well as intellectually engages at a deeper level which can benefit the research process, although the pitfalls of recognising emotion in this way can put researchers at risk of not being taken seriously (Gilbert, 2001). For example, ‘reason’ is held in higher esteem than emotion and it is reason that is thought to aid the acquisition of knowledge (Jaggar, 1989).

These accounts show us that there is much more to life history than telling tales. **Figure 1** attempts to illustrate the complexities of the relationships with female school leaders, their intelligent use of emotions and their life history. The depths of life history (which are sometimes hidden) are valuable to our understanding of the nature of the headteachers’ experiences, behaviours and identities. Goodley et al. (2004: p. 149) re-

ferred to Mitroff & Kilman (1978: p. 83) and stated that “[t]he best stories are those which stir people’s minds, hearts and souls, and by doing so give them new insights into themselves, their problems and their human condition”. So, when going through the process to reveal the “figure under the carpet” life history is valuable to understand headteacher identity and behaviour. Life history provides a way of understanding individual personality and social behaviour as well as making sense of the world in which we live; these things we should never lose sight of as the pace of educational reform quickens and educational landscapes continue to shift.

## References

- Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2000). *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage.
- Antikainen, A., Houtsonen, J., Kauppila, J., & Huotelin, H. (1996). *Living in a Learning Society: Life Histories, Identities and Education*. London and Washington, DC: The Falmer Press.
- Babcock, L. C., & Laschever, S. (2003). *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*. Princeton, NJ and Woodstock: Princeton University Press.
- Beatty, B. (2005). Emotional Leadership. In B. Davies (Ed.), *The Essentials of School Leadership* (pp. 122-144). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Blackmore, J. (1989). Educational Leadership: A Feminist Critique and Reconstruction. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Educational Leadership* (pp. 93-130). London: Falmer Press.
- Blackmore, J. (1999). *Troubling Women: Feminism, Leadership and Educational Change*. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Carspecken, P. F. (1996). *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Chase, S. E. (2005) Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research: Third Edition* (pp. 651-679). London, Thousand Oaks, CA, and New Delhi: Sage.
- Christians, C. G. (2005). Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research: Third Edition* (pp. 139-164). London, Thousand Oaks, CA, and New Delhi: Sage.
- Ciarrochi, J., Forgas, J. P., & Mayer, J. D. (2001). *Emotional Intelligence in Everyday Life: A Scientific Inquiry*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.
- Cliffe, J. (2011). Emotional Intelligence: A Study of Female Secondary School Headteachers. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39, 205-218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143210390057>
- Cliffe, J. (2012). Female Headship and Life History Research: Using Emotional Turning Points. *BELMAS International Conference*, 20-22 July 2012, Manchester, UK: Midland Manchester.
- Cliffe, J. E. (2008). *Emotional Intelligence and School Leadership: Testing for and Evaluating the Role of Emotional Intelligence in a Group of Female Secondary School Leaders*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Coleman, M. (1996). The Management Style of Female Headteachers. *Education Management & Administration*, 24, 163-174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263211X96242005>
- Coleman, M. (2002). *Women as Headteachers: Striking the Balance*. Sterling, VA: Trentham Books.

- Coles, R. (1989). *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Cooper, R. K., & Sawaf, A. (1997). *Executive EQ: Emotional Intelligence in Business*. London: Orion Business Books.
- Crawford, M. (2009). *Getting to the Heart of Leadership: Emotion and the Educational Leader*. London: Sage.
- Cunnison, S. (1985). *Making It in a Man's World: Women Teachers in a Senior High School*. Occasional Paper No. 1, Hull: University of Hull Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology.
- Derrida, J. (1981). *Positions*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Edel, L. (1979). The Figure under the Carpet. In M. Pachter (Ed.), *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art* (pp. 16-34). Washington DC: New Republic Books.
- Evetts, J. (1990). *Women in Primary Teaching: Career Contexts and Strategies*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Fuller, K. (2009). Women Secondary Headteachers: Alive and Well in Birmingham at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century. *Management in Education*, 23, 19-31.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020608099078>
- Gilbert, K. R. (2001). Introduction: Why Are We Interested in Emotions? In K. R. Gilbert (Ed.), *The Emotional Nature of Qualitative Research* (pp. 3-16). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., Clough, P., & Moore, M. (2004). *Researching Life Stories: Method, Theory and Analysis in Biographical Age*. London: Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203413371>
- Gray, H. L. (1989). Gender Considerations in School Management: Masculine and Feminine Leadership Styles. In C. Riches, & C. Morgan (Eds.), *Human Resource Management in Education* (pp. 120-123). Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Gray, H. L. (1993). Gender Issues in Management Training. In J. Ozga (Ed.), *Women in Education Management* (pp. 106-115). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gronn, P. (2003). *The New Work of Educational Leaders: Changing Leadership Practice in an Era of School Reform*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hall, V. (1993). Women in Education Management: A Review of Research in Britain. In J. Ouston (Ed.), *Women in Education Management* (pp. 23-46). Harlow: Longman.
- Hall, V. (1996). *Dancing on the Ceiling: A Study of Women Managers in Education*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Hedlund, J., & Sternberg, R. J. (2000). Too Many Intelligences? Integrating Social, Emotional, and Practical Intelligence. In R. Bar-On, & J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Development, Assessment, and Application at Home, School, and in the Workplace* (pp. 136-167). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of Los Angeles Press.
- Hodder, I. (1994). The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 673-715). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jaggar, A. M. (1989). Love and Knowledge. *Inquiry*, 32, 51-176.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00201748908602185>
- Kram, K. E., & Cherniss, C. (2001). Developing Emotional Competence through Relationships at Work. In C. Cherniss, & D. Goleman (Eds.), *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace: How to*

- Select for, Measure and Improve Emotional Intelligence in Individuals, Groups and Organisations* (pp. 254-285). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research* (2nd ed.). New York: Academic Press.
- Levinson, D. J., Darrow, D., Levinson, M., & McKee, B. (1978). *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York: Knopf.
- Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). What Is Emotional Intelligence? In P. Salovey, & D. J. Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Educational Implications* (pp. 3-34). New York: Basic Books.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2006). *Personal Summary Report*. Toronto: Multi-Health Systems.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2000). Emotional Intelligence as Zeitgeist, as Personality, and as a Mental Ability. In R. Bar-On, & J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Development, Assessment, and Application at Home, School, and in the Workplace* (pp. 92-117). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- McAfee, N. (2004). *Julia Kristeva*. London: Routledge.
- Mitroff, I., & Killman, R. (1978). *Methodology Approaches to Social Science: Integrating Divergent Concepts and Theories*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Moorosi, P. (2010). South African Female Principals' Career Paths: Understanding the Gender gap in Secondary School Management. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 38, 547-562. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143210373741>
- Morrison, M., & Ecclestone, K. (2011). Getting Emotional: A Critical Evaluation of Recent Trends in the Development of School Leaders. *School Leadership & Management: Formally School Organisation*, 31, 199-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2011.587407>
- Pirouznia, M. (2013). Voices of Ohio Women Aspiring to Principals. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 14, 300-310.
- Q-Metrics (1996/1997). *EQ Map Interpretation Guide*. San Francisco, CA: Q-Metrics.
- Q-Metrics (2006). *EQ Map Interpretation Guide*. San Francisco, CA: Q-Metrics.
- Russell, J. A., & Barchard, J. A. (2002). Toward a Shared Language for Emotion and Emotional Intelligence. In L. Feldman Barrett, & P. Salovey (Eds.), *The Wisdom in Feeling: Psychological Processes in Emotional Intelligence* (pp. 363-382). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Saarni, C. (2000). Emotional Competence: A Developmental Perspective. In R. Bar-On, & J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Development, Assessment, and Application at Home, School, and in the Workplace* (pp. 68-91). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Saussure, F. (1916). *Course in General Linguistics*. London: Duckworth.
- Schmuck, P. A. (1986). School Management and Administration: An Analysis by Gender. In E. Hoyle, & A. McMahon (Eds.), *The Management of Schools, World Year Book of Education* (pp. 173-183). London: Kogan Page.
- Shakeshaft, C. (1993). Women in Education Management in the United States. In J. Ouston (Ed.), *Women in Education Management* (pp. 47-63). Harlow: Longman.
- Sheldon, A. (1997). Talking Power: Girls, Gender Enculturation and Discourse: In R. Wodak (Ed.), *Gender and Discourse* (pp. 225-244). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250204.n10>
- Smith, J. M. (2011a). Agency and Female Teachers' Career Decisions: A Life History Study of 40 Women. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39, 7-24.



<https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143210383900>

- Smith, J. M. (2011b). Aspirations to and Perceptions of Secondary Headship: Contrasting Female Teachers' and Headteachers' Perspectives. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39, 516-535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143211408450>
- Smith, L. M. (1998). Biographical Method. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (pp. 184-224). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Spencer, A., & Podmore, D. (1987). *In a Man's World: Essays on Women in Male-Dominated Professions*. London: Tavistock.
- Timpano, D. M., & Knight, L. W. (1976). *Sex Discrimination—The Selection of School District Administrators: What Can Be Done?* NIE Papers-Education and Work No. 3.
- Zirkel, S. (2000). Social Intelligence: The Development and Maintenance of Purposive Behaviour. In R. Bar-On, & J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Development, Assessment, and Application at Home, School, and in the Workplace* (pp. 3-27). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



Scientific Research Publishing

**Submit or recommend next manuscript to SCIRP and we will provide best service for you:**

- Accepting pre-submission inquiries through Email, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.
- A wide selection of journals (inclusive of 9 subjects, more than 200 journals)
- Providing 24-hour high-quality service
- User-friendly online submission system
- Fair and swift peer-review system
- Efficient typesetting and proofreading procedure
- Display of the result of downloads and visits, as well as the number of cited articles
- Maximum dissemination of your research work

Submit your manuscript at: <http://papersubmission.scirp.org/>

Or contact [ce@scirp.org](mailto:ce@scirp.org)

