The Container Contained: biography and role as factors in managing stress for secondary head-teachers – a psychosocial analysis

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Abstract

This research explored the experiences of three secondary headteachers and the way in which role conception, informed by unconscious processes, functions as a mechanism for managing the stresses and demands of said role. The research was underpinned by a psychosocial framework and used an explicitly psychoanalytic epistemology. The research used semi-structured interviews to explore influential biographical factors, which were then explored using a psychoanalytic lens. This produced a series of themes used to thematically analyse their accounts of their jobs and the stresses and strains within it. The ensuing analysis revealed that the unconscious patterns, implicit in their narratives, influenced both role conception and the way they perceived and related to the organisations they led. In discussing these findings, links were made to relevant psychoanalytic and systems-psychodynamic theory; especially Bion's work on containment and alpha function, as well as Rice's seminal thinking about the way in which the unconscious influences role acquisition and task engagement. Further applications to both theories are suggested. A central argument is that working with school leaders has a systemic impact on schools and school populations, something well within the remit and consultative skill-set of Educational Psychologists. This research concludes that unconscious patterns and processes are involved in the management of stress and anxiety and that this is done through unconsciously "shaping" the way headteachers conceive of the role and the schools they lead.

"The fourth subject is the most important – the teachers themselves. They are education, and yet very little is systematically known about them. Almost any additional knowledge will be welcome …

Who are these people prepared to devote themselves to education? Why do they take it up and what happens when they do?

… Nor is much known about how, in detail, teachers spend their time when they are established. The "Natural History" of the school still awaits its Gilbert White... I expect that the most rewarding research in the next quarter of a century will be anthropological in inspiration – small-scale intensive studies of individual schools and classrooms and the richness of human relationship within them."

Michael Young
Founder of the magazine's WHERE? And WHICH?

And remember this. The school is the most complex institution. Children and teachers, administrators and their minor officials, caretakers, cooks, medical officers, government inspectors, governors. And parents. All these grinding away, in and out of mesh. Is there any wonder then that sometimes – as in this case of Harpole – there is a terrifying jarring of gears or, worse still, that unforgettable cough and thump of a big-end gone?

J. L. Carr
The Harpole Report

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Summary of abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviation	Abbreviation/acronym in full
APA	Applied Psychology Assignment (completed as part of the doctoral study program)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Skills
EP	Educational Psychologist
FANI	Free Association Narrative Interview
FRLM	Full Range Leadership Model
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector (of Schools)
LCL	Learning Centered Leadership
LMS	Local Management of Schools
NCSL	National College of School Leadership
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
ORT	Object Relations Technique
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEN	Special Educational Needs

Introduction

This is a qualitative study exploring how unconscious factors, rooted in biography, influence the manner in which three secondary school headteachers conceive of their role in relation to their organisations and use this to manage the resultant stresses and demands of the role. The research purpose is primarily exploratory, although self-knowledge through feedback to participants will be emancipatory for some. This is a psychosocial study and employs an explicitly psychoanalytic epistemology. Data gathering uses a semi-structured interview approach known as the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) based on psychosocial research by Hollway and Jefferson (2013). Data is analysed using a multi-staged approach that seeks to identify unconscious patterns and preoccupations through the elaboration and analysis of biographical vignettes. These are then used as a psychoanalytic "lens" to thematically analyse accounts of what it is like to be a secondary school headteacher, with its attendant pressures, demands and stresses. This study focuses specifically on role conception, informed by unconscious processes, as a mediating construct for managing and containing these pressures, demands and stresses.

This introduction makes clear the researcher's interests in the area of study before going on to locate the research in national and local contexts.

Researcher's background and research interest.

The researcher is an Educational Psychologist (EP) with ten years Local Authority experience, now working independently. During initial training at the Tavistock Centre, the researcher was introduced to psychoanalytic and systems theory, with opportunities to apply it to practice – as an EP. He was also introduced to group dynamic theory and

to experiential learning in the form of Group Relations Conferences (Rice, 1965). These experiences, along with having a tutor who was an organisational consultant, excited an interest in applying psychoanalytic ideas systemically in schools. This led to a greater immersion in psychoanalytic organisational literature and the superordinate discipline of "systems-psychodynamics" (Neumann, 1999), "an inter-disciplinary field that integrates three disciplines – the practice of psychoanalysis, the theories of group relations and open systems perspectives" (Fraher 2004, p.1).

After completion of the EP masters, the researcher embarked on subsequent training with the Tavistock Consultancy Service, an offshoot of the Tavistock Centre, engaged in systems-psychodynamic organisational consultancy. Subsequently, as part of this doctorate, the researcher attended the first year of a Masters course entitled "Consultation and the Organisation: Psychoanalytic Approaches".

Influenced by these ideas, the researcher has, for a long time, offered headteachers consultation for work related issues. This has led to very interesting and rewarding professional experiences, including feedback from headteachers about the usefulness of the offer. In undertaking these activities the author was struck by the similarities of this form of "executive consultation" to the consultation training he received as an EP. It raised questions about why EPs offer headteachers this service so infrequently and why work with school (and other) leaders and leadership teams was not considered within their remit or skill set. For the researcher, it was often one of his most interesting activities and provided insight into systemic functioning that helped with more typical work with children and families, including children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

This research is an attempt to explore the unconscious world of headteachers, and to develop a method for clarifying ways in which the unconscious influences role conception and organisational behaviour. It recognises, of course, that there are rational, conscious factors that influence headteacher behaviour but these are not a consideration of this study. The study also argues that psychoanalytic methods of enquiry are legitimate and effective tools that EPs can use as part of their role and, further, that EPs can consider working at the leadership level when supporting schools. It is recognised that the focus area is a novel one for EPs but, as will be seen in the literature review, there is a relative dearth of work exploring the psychology of headteacher stress and ways of supporting it. It is argued that, in utilising a psychoanalytic approach and drawing ideas from systems-psychodynamics, EPs are powerfully placed to effect individual and systemic changes by working with headteachers and senior leaders.

It is also envisaged that, by offering insight into the unconscious processes of the participants, this research may go some way to supporting individuals who joined a helping profession and who have found themselves subject to greater and more varied pressures as education has become ever more politicised and uncertain.

National context

The education landscape has altered considerably over the last five to ten years. The current scenario sees Academies, Free Schools and possibly, soon, Grammar schools, joining existing Local Authority and Independent Schools. Central to the discourse on education is the role of the headteacher. From Ed Ball's "638" failing secondary

schools in 2008, to the claims that Academies will give them more power, headteachers have played a significant role in the public discourse around school improvement.

The role itself has shifted considerably over time from that of "master-teacher" to "business manager" (Tucker, 2010). In essence, headteachers have moved from being master-pedagogues, modelling good practice and leading other teachers, to something akin to a CEO, responsible for vision, ethos, raising standards, improving discipline, mergers (of schools), managing vast budgets and redundancies. This exists in a wider societal context in which schools, through education, project society into the future, preparing children for jobs that do not yet exist. The role is varied and demanding, with headteachers managing multiple demands on their times.

The increased emphasis on attainment, laudable in itself, has been accompanied by increased job uncertainty for headteachers, with some commentators remarking on similarities to football coaches, who are summarily fired after poor results (Huffington Post, 2012). This increased focus and uncertainty has obvious implications for stress and morale. As one anonymous headteacher, awaiting imminent GCSE results, writes:

But I have little faith in the system now. I've been suffering from anxiety since October. I've been lying awake in the small hours trying to figure out what else we could do. When I wake up it is often the first thing I think about. My stress-related psoriasis and irritable bowel syndrome have never been worse and I've had more migraines in the past 12 months than in the past 10 years.
(Anonymous, the Guardian, 2016)

He goes on to mention the negative impact of the role in terms of increased blood pressure, damaged relationships with his own wife and children and distance from friends.

This is not an isolated example and these experiences are affecting headteacher recruitment. A recent Guardian article observed that the high levels of stress and workload has led to a reduction in applications, "while taking on a challenging school with a poor OFSTED rating is seen as a career risk" (Weale, 2016). Weale (ibid) cites a recent National Governors' Association survey in which 43% of the respondents reported difficulties recruiting senior staff, while 28% of headteachers said they planned to leave headship within five years. The demands and stresses are so off-putting that there is a risk of some schools having no headteacher for extended periods of time. This is compounded by the relative lack of support headteachers receive in role. Professor John Howson, in his interview with the Guardian stated that

rarely since [the 1980s] has there been as much concern over finding the next generation of school leaders as there is now. Leading in school will only become an attractive career option again once it is accepted that leaders themselves need support and recognition for their work. (Weale, 2016).

Recognising the systemic function of leadership, as this study does, it becomes clear that the felt experiences of headteachers – how they experience and manage the stresses and demands of the role – has implications for those within the school, including students. Understanding the experience of headteachers and supporting them, then, has a systemic ripple effect on the whole school. This is something within the purview of

the more traditional EP role, working systemically within the school to support children, including those with SEN, although, admittedly, from a new angle. EPs, with their psychological knowledge and skills, are ideally placed to support individual headteachers, the systems they lead and the students within them. Given that the changes in education policy and local authority funding also affect EPs and their services, the increased pressures visited upon headteachers and senior leaders present an opportunity to extend and develop existing EP activities and skill-sets in new and creative ways.

<u>The local context</u>

The context in which the researcher, as an EP, works and in which this research takes place reflect the wider educational dynamics described above. A rural county with patches of deprivation matching inner-city London, educational provision has altered dramatically over the past five years: the three heads interviewed lead very different organisations: a church school, a local authority maintained school and a school that is part of a multi-Academy trust.

This study has been preceded by quantitative research into headteachers stress in a not dissimilar county nearby (Phillips, Sen and McNamee, 2007), which reported a high prevalence of work related stress, with 43% of headteachers rating their job as "extremely or very stressful" (2007, p. 369).

It would seem that the job is as demanding as ever, with local headteachers denouncing government plans for grammar schools as socially divisive, especially in a rural county.

More recently, delays to changes in school funding led local headteachers to announce on national news that budgetary shortfalls may lead to a four day teaching week.

The local authority educational psychology service, in which the researcher has worked, has also suffered the effects of reduced budgets, and has provided only statutory work in the last few years. When the question is raised of whether EPs should work in schools at the leadership level, it can be countered with this: what could EPs do and what would they do, if they had greater freedom and latitude to select work they feel is useful, meaningful and effective?

It is within this context that this research rests. Now, as an independent practitioner, the researcher strives to find new ways of making the role of an educational psychologist relevant to schools seeking to buy in such a service. While work with headteachers is a small part of this, it is an important one.

Literature review

<u>Introduction</u>

This section describes the literature searches undertaken to identify research related to the focus of this study: how role conception, shaped by experience, informs the manner in which the demands of being a headteacher are managed. In doing so, this review presents two sets of research. The first is related to head teachers as leaders. The second is a theoretical overview of key psychoanalytic and systems-psychodynamic concepts that have contributed to the intellectual development of this thesis. In both cases the challenge has been to reduce a huge amount of information to a size that is manageable, while at the same time remaining useful and relevant. The literature search on research into headteachers produced a wide range of articles and studies across different countries over the last thirty years. For the reasons stated above, papers were selected that consider headteachers in the United Kingdom.

Primary papers on research into headteachers experience were written no later than 2000, although a more realistic marker is papers published after the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), as this is generally recognised to be a watershed in terms of the changing role of headteachers to date (Lyng, 2013). The academies bill and subsequent legislation will change the role of the headteacher substantially for the next generation of headteachers. The review of psychoanalytic and systems-psychodynamic literature was not subject to any time limits.

<u>Literature search</u>

<u>Research on head teachers and leadership</u>

A literature search was carried out carried out using the following databases: PEP Archive; PSycINFO; Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection; PsyARTICLES and ebook collections (20.8.15, 5.12.15, 31.3.16). Searched terms used and the number of returns are below:

- headteacher (756)

- head teacher (388)

- head teacher, headteacher, biography (zero)

- head teacher, stress (20)

- headteacher, stress (8)

- headteacher, headteacher role (130)

- School principal (12,245)

- school principal, role (2295)

- school principal, stress (438)

- education leadership (2064)

- leadership, containment (115)

The number of returns of key searches were often too large to be useful and frequently contained articles unrelated to this study. However, reviewing the references of the most relevant articles did yield a number of suitable articles, chapters and PhD theses. In addition, a search was made using Google, employing the terms above, as well as "experience of headteachers", and "headteacher research". Google Scholar was used to trace articles that referenced an existing relevant article and produced "A Day in the Life of a Headteacher" (Bristowe, Ireson and Coleman, 2007) and "Experiences of New Headteachers in Cities" (Early, Nelson, Higham, Bubb, Porritt & Coates, 2011).

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The researcher undertook a paper by paper appraisal of abstracts and reference sections of all selected papers to identify books and further articles that would lead to a relevant and rational corpus of research within which this research could sit. The overlap between headship and leadership is great and the literature on the latter is vast. Care was taken to remain relevant to the particular experiences of headteachers as a specific form of leadership and to remain focused on:

- The experience of headteachers

- The demands of the role, including internal and external pressures and stressors

- Well-being and emotional resilience

- The realm of the psychological, including biography

- Reference to psychoanalytic and systems-psychodynamic ideas.

The following section discusses the literature search around headteachers and leadership.

The influence of policy on role

The headteacher is an archetypal authority figure, with associations to unchallenged authority going as far back as the apocryphal account of King Charles II doffing his hat in deference to a headteacher (Tyree, 1996). Monk (2005) explores several constructions of the role of the headteacher in relation to school exclusion, noting that the powers of heads, in relation to exclusion, are considerable. Translated to a criminal court, such powers would "be considered an abuse of the rights to a fair trial under article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights" (ibid, p.401). Considered through a more anthropological lens, he draws parallels between headteachers and colonial rulers and tribal chiefs in traditional societies who operate a form of

"repressive peace making" (Black and Baumgartner, 1997), where the power to exclude is a version of the tribal chief's power of banishment. Norwood states that:

it is a tradition of English life that the headmaster is an autocratic of autocrats and the very mention of the title conjures up in the minds of most people figures before which they trembled in their youth, and with which they have never felt quite comfortable even in mature life. The headmaster, in most English schools, certainly holds the position of absolute power, for which no analogy can be found in any other profession whatever, a position further, of authority and influence far surpassing all that is exercised by those of the same rank in other countries.

(Norwood, 1909, p. 213)

Jones (2003) argues that one of the effects of New Labour education policies was to reinforce the centrality of "managerialism", which served to shift school cultures from one of collegiate responsibility to one where the leader is seen as a chief enabler of school improvement, as demonstrated by the development of the "super head" as a means of improving failing schools (Harris, 2004). Ball (1994) proposes two conflicting premises inherent within the role of the headteacher. On the one hand there is the discourse of professionalism, which is "informed and invested by images of head teacherly authority which stretch back to the reform of the public schools in the 19th century" (ibid, p.93). On the other hand, emerging from policy informed by neo-liberalist monetary ideology, is the discourse of the head-as-business-manager. The latter serves to separate and differentiate headteachers from teachers, in operational and strategic terms, to such an extent that, at one stage, there were government plans to allow non-teachers to be heads of primary and special schools. (Maddern, 2010).

In terms of key policies shaping the role of the headteacher, the 1988 Education Reform Act – ERA - (UK Government, 1988) played a pivotal role, although Downes (1998) notes, "the sequence of Education Acts throughout the 1980s burst open the world of the school" (p.30). Tucker (2013) observes "even before the changes introduced by the Education Act of 1988, it appears that educational professionals represented a discontented group" (p3). The 1988 ERA "heralded a major shift towards significant central government control of state secondary schools" (Lyng 2013 p.3), while paradoxically creating a "quasi market within education" (Tucker, 2013, p.3). The Act introduced changes to the educational process itself, through the introduction of a national curriculum, national assessments and inspection arrangements. The subsequent creation of OFSTED, supplanting HMI as an inspection body, increased both accountability and the possibility of comparison between schools. It also increased the need for compliance with central government legislation and expectation. At the same time, the second strand of the 1988 ERA included the offer of Local Management of Schools (LMS), which devolved more financial responsibility to heads, thereby reducing the role of Local Authority involvement in school financial matters (Downes 1998; Lyng, 2013). Open enrolment, which gave increased parental choice of school, and the publication of league tables were also outcomes of the 1988 ERA.

All of these had a considerable effect on the role of the headteacher. Exworthy and Halford (1999) state that one of the consequences of the 1988 ERA was a shift from "community servant" to a "sales-person" of "an educational commodity" (1999, p.69). This is supported by Downes (1998), who compares the differences in the experiences of a pre- and post-ERA head. Where once it would have been sufficient for a head to be a good teacher, then a successful head of department (both of which had an

unspecified quality), then a versatile deputy head and finally, for "those with ambition… good interviewing technique and a spark of vision or originality" headship (Downes, 1998, p.26), the role post-ERA was radically different. Greater financial freedom and responsibility led to a need to master financial management as well as legal and personnel skills, improved public relations skills, marketing, negotiation, statistics and much else besides. McHugh (1995) noted that the ERA-instigated changes were traumatic for headteachers as they shifted rapidly from master-teacher to managers. Indeed, there was a sense that the ERA was intended to reproduce a more corporate model for the running of schools. Ball (1990, p.67) wrote: "the model of the organisation which the ERA implies is clear: it is that of governors as the Board of Directors and Headteacher as Chief Executive". The role of the headteacher was changing.

One outcome of this for headteachers was the gradual distancing between the headteacher and support from the Local Authority, where the rapport between Head and LEA Officers had been "one of mutual professional recognition and positive partnership… a sense of being part of a team, more or less effectively, led by the Director [of the LEA]" (Downes, 1998, p.29). The distancing and diminishment of collegiate support for the head from fellow "master-teachers" and respectful LEA representative signified a dissolution of containing structures that would support a headteacher in role. Bangs, MacBeath and Galton (2011) observe that the conflation of greater, responsibility, accountability and public scrutiny has meant that headteachers have had "their confidence and self-esteem challenged at every turn" (2011, p.16).

Policy and legislation following the election of New Labour in 1998 continued the drive toward more centralised Government control (Lyng, 2013). Subsequent Acts may have augmented requirements around standardised national assessment and the nature of the national curriculum but they have not substantially altered the role of the headteacher-as-manager. Indeed, activities such as target-setting and the instigation of Performance Management and Performance Related Pay have further distanced headteachers from the workforce, leading to "distrust and demoralisation" (Bottery, 2004, p.87). Hargreaves (2003) noted that there was a danger of limiting the growth of meaningful learning communities by turning educators (and their leaders) into "performance sects" (2003, p.144). Lyng (2013) states that "school leaders themselves work in a context which is tightly controlled by central government policy and is challenging and demanding in its scale and range of tasks" (2011, p.9).

The passing of the Academies Act (UK Government, 2010) and subsequent 2011 Education Act has led to what "could be the most radical overhaul of schools in England for a generation" (Harrison, 2010). It is not yet clear what the full extent of Academisation will be on schools and on the role of the headteacher. The intention is to allow schools even more freedom from Local Authority oversight. Certainly headteachers will have greater power to decide staff salaries and, to a degree, to diverge from the National Curriculum. Clearly these and other factors will affect how headteachers construe their role and the type of stressors they face.

<u>Leadership</u>

The above section charted the shift from headteacher as master-teacher in a collegiate environment to a leader of a school as a complex, multi-faceted organisation.

Following changes to policy and role, it was recognised that the demands of the role required additional training, leading to the development of the National College of School Leaders (NCSL) in 2000. While some asserted that it was originally a mechanism for ensuring compliance with government drives for School Improvement (Hatcher, 2001; Bangs et al, 2011), the NCSL has "transcended this to become a world recognised centre for leadership development" (Lyng, 2013, p.11). The formation - and development - of the NCSL has had a "major impact on the significance attached to leadership development" (Early and Jones, 2009, p.166). In the space of less than twenty years, the headteacher role and related literature has slowly joined the corpus of literature concerned with leadership as a general and generalizable activity. A full account of leadership theories is not within the scope of this review, which is focused on the experience of headteachers. However, the next section does discuss research into headteachers as leaders and will discuss some of the more significant leadership theories in passing.

Leadership and headship – theories and impact

Definitions

The field of leadership studies has produced numerous theories about what a leader is and does. Theorists also attempt distinctions between leaders and managers: for example, Bennis and Nanus (1985, p.21) describe leaders as doing the right thing" and managers as "doing things right". The Oxford English Dictionary defines a leader as "the person who leads or commands a group, organization, or country" but this obscures much. Dubrin (2000) estimated about 35,000 definitions of leadership within academic literature, a central activity being the "influencing" others (Katz & Khan, 1978: Hersey and Balchard, 1988; Zaleznik, 1992). Jaques and Clement (1994) state that "leadership

is the process in which one person sets the purpose or direction for one or more other persons and gets them to move along together with him or her and with each other in that direction with competence and full commitment" (1994, p.4). Within the systems-psychodynamic tradition, discussed further below, leadership is seen as a boundary function, regulating inputs and outputs and directing internal resources to meet the demands of the organisational task (Rice, 1963; Gould, Stapley and Stein, 2001).

Within the field of education, leadership has become an increasingly popular topic. Van Dick, Hirst and Grosjean (2007) studied the link between organizational identification and follower attitudes, exploring, through surveys, the attitudes of eight hundred teachers and eighty-two head-teachers in Germany. While acknowledging the limitations of the study and pointing to further studies, they conclude that leader organisational identification is related to follower organisational identification. This has implications for policies and practice within leadership studies and also for this study, part of which explores the nature and processes by which leaders identify and construe the organisations they lead.

Barker, (2001) studied three secondary schools under successive headteachers. He used Litwin and Singer's (1968) theories of leadership and performance to analyse progress in each school. Litwin (1968) and Litwin and Singer (1966) set up experiments to explore how leadership styles created organisational climates. Three styles were developed which, briefly, are as follows: A, which is controlling, focused on rules, control, order and criticism of poor performance; B, which is informal and relaxed and emphasises friendly relations, rewards and cooperation and; C, which is relatively informal, rewards excellent performance, has high standards and is orientated around

cooperation as well as challenge. Barker (2001) concluded that Type C leadership led to optimal progress in the observed schools and that leadership does matter in raising performance in schools. While admittedly a small scale study, it does replicate findings made by Litwin and Singer (1966).

Conceptions of leadership in schools have followed similar theoretical trends to those found in general leadership studies.

Trait theory

Trait theory, which supposes that leaders have specific qualities that denote them as leaders, has its origins in the writings of Plato and Plutarch (Northouse, 2013). With a series of studies from the 1940s Stogdill (1948) found that a number of traits were identified in leaders, but not a single identifiable leadership "trait". While attractive, critics do comment that trait theory can lead to over-simplification (Western, 2008). Zaccarro (2007) notes that trait theories continue to focus on the Big Five personality traits of openness, intelligence, adjustment, extraversion and conscientiousness and neglects motives, values and other acquirable skills. Goleman (1998), with the concept of emotional intelligence, moves away from the idea of innate traits towards "competences" that can be acquired. Forde, Hobby and Lees (2000) compare the leadership of headteachers and senior executives. They acknowledge skills and traits are important but that "deeper characteristics such as motives and habits, rather than skills and knowledge are the strongest predictors of success" (2004, p.24). This study suggests unconscious factors also play a significant part. Day, Sammons, Hopkins and Harris (2010) assert that headteacher effectiveness is explained by a small number of personality traits and that "research points to evidence of an association between

leaders' personal qualities and leadership success" (2010, p.7). Critics of trait theory question the open-endedness of traits and the overwhelming and confusing literature (Kets de Vries, 1994) as well as the fact that it seems to suggest a one size fits all model which ignores context (Western, 2008).

Contingency theory

Contingency theories of leadership (Fiedler, 1967, Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973) base leadership effectiveness on "situational contingency" (Fiedler, 1967). This is the interaction between a leadership style and the specific situation: there is a range of styles contingent upon the situation at hand. Fiedler (1967) distinguished between two types of leader: task orientated leaders who give primacy to the task, regardless of social relations and; relationship-orientated leaders, who focus on emotional engagement with followers (Northouse, 2013). Leadership situations have three variables: leader-member relations; task structure and; position power. The most effective leadership style depends on which variables are in play at any given moment. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) developed the leadership continuum, with autocratic decision-making at one end and delegated decision making at the other, with effective leaders moving along this scale as necessary. Furthermore, a leader needs to be cognizant of three forces when responding to a situation. First are the forces within a leader's own psychology, skills and knowledge (in which this research is most interested). Second are forces in the subordinate, of the same nature. Finally, there are forces in the situation, arising out of its organisational context and demands. As Lyng (2013) notes, "schools are subject to on-going external accountability and standards which are continuously being updated" (2013, p.41) and headteachers must continually be mindful of the type of leadership each situation requires.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership

 While originally separate theories, transactional and transformational leadership styles are now seen as related positions along a continuum (Yammarino, 1993). Transactional or Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Northouse, 2013) holds that the leader is given power to perform certain tasks and to punish or reward team performance. In other words, there is a transaction between leader and follower depending on what is or is not done (Burns, 1978). Within these multiple leader-subordinate "dyads" (Northouse, 2013) the formal and informal relationships and roles undertaken lead to the development of *in* and *out-groups* (Dansereau, Graen and Haga, 1975). The former has greater influence on, and proximity to, their leader, who sees them as having similar views and outlook and who will be willing to take on additional roles and tasks in transaction for these factors. The out-group is more formal and is described as being "less compatible… and usually just come to work, do their job and go home" (Northouse, 2013. p. 164). One of the foci of transactional leadership theory is getting leaders to expand the in-group through interaction with followers (Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991).

Transformational leaders "motivate followers to go beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group, organisation or society" (Bass and Bass, 2008, p.50). Like Ghandi or John F. Kennedy, followers are exhorted to rise to higher levels of motivation and morality through the transforming effect of the leader: the leader makes them better people. Transformational leadership is conceived as being part of a continuum of a full range leadership model (FRLM) that Bass (1985) holds encompasses both transactional and transformational approaches, with the latter proposing to elevate self-interest for organisational aims through four features: idealised influence (respect and admiration

of followers); inspirational motivation (high expectations and strong motivation to be a part of organisational vision); intellectual stimulation (stimulating followers to be creative and innovative) and; individual consideration (listening and promoting employees' professional growth).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) conducted a review of research into transformational leadership in schools, examining 32 studies between 1996 and 2005. As part of the data analysis process they developed a repertoire of "transformational leadership behaviours", drawing on Bass's models of transformational and transactional leadership (Bass and Alvolio, 1994). Locating such leadership styles in schools, they introduced four new management dimensions which previous research (Leithwood and Duke, 1999) indicated were effective in schools: "establishing effective staffing practices; providing instructional support; monitoring school activities and; buffering staff from excessive and distracting external demands" (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005, p.181). These are more to the transactional end of the leadership spectrum. Their model also included transformational leadership components such as clear vision, high expectations, modelling key values and practices and building collaborative cultures (ibid). Taken together, the transformational and transactional components offer a FRLM that has demonstrated effectiveness in school leadership. In their review they found that such leadership behaviours had an effect on student achievement and engagement in schools, although this was moderated by factors including school culture, teacher commitment and job satisfaction. Leithwood and Jantzi's (2005) model of school leadership, with distinctive features related to leading a school, took and developed Bass's generic leadership model. The following leadership theories are explicitly concerned with education.

Learning Centred Leadership (LCL)

The ultimate function of leadership is to ensure organisational functioning and output and a number of studies confirm that school leadership indirectly influences student achievement through the shaping of school climate (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Ekval and Ryhammar, 1999; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006). This is by Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu and Brown, (2009), where it is noted that "their [headteachers'] educational values, reflective strategies and leadership practices shape the internal processes and pedagogies that result in improved pupil outcomes" (p.2). Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009), Marks and Printy (2002) and Day et al (2010) observe that the most effective leadership styles merge transformational approaches with instructional leadership, enabling headteachers to influence student outcomes. It is interesting to note that there is no explicit reference to unconscious processes influencing leadership style and how the role is taken up.

Instructional leadership, which is focused more explicitly on defining school mission, managing the teaching program and developing school climate (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985) has returned as a relevant leadership paradigm in schools. Hallinger (2005) redefines it as a leadership style that shares purpose across a leadership team, with a focus on innovation, development of teaching and learning that uses a coherent curriculum. It is also highly inclusive of all stakeholders, including: student voice (O'Donoghue and Clarke, 2010,); parental involvement (Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall and Strauss, 2010); school governors (Taylor, 2009); outside agencies (Day et al 2010) and; the prioritising of ongoing leadership capacity building within the school (Dimmock, 2012).

Such bespoke priorities indicate a specific subset of leadership – learning centred leadership (LCL) – which has its specific focus in the world of education. LCL is occupied with enhancing student learning (Southworth, 2010) and developing staff capacity to support this (DuFour, 2009). School leadership theory and practise has, therefore, amalgamated aspects of transformational, transactional and instructional leadership with two important additions. First, is a more inclusive act of delegated and shared instructional leadership, which involves and includes teachers in formal and informal leadership roles, working with other stakeholders to develop student outcomes (Marks and Printy, 2002). Secondly, pedagogic leadership strives to place students at the centre of the learning focus, with teachers empowered to take appropriate responsibility for student learning and outcomes. This introduces a moral purpose to the function of leading a school (McNeil, Cavanagh and Silcox, 2005). Lyng (2013) has categorised school leadership practice under three headings: pedagogical purpose, engagement, and empowerment. He reflects how school leadership theory has taken and adapted leadership theories to fit the unique task a school is designed to contend with: student learning.

This section has considered the main leadership theories in relation to headteachers. As time has gone on specific forms of leadership theory have developed, outlining the chief pre-occupations of schools and headteachers, discussed next.

The experiences of headteachers

The changing role of the headteacher has attracted several significant studies into the day-to-day experiences of the headteacher. Bristowe et al (2007) note that there has been a lack of research into the experiences of headteachers, with previous studies

tending to focus on teaching in general. A major exception is the work of Cooper and Kelly (1993) on headteacher stress (discussed below). Bristowe et al's research – "A life in the day of a headteacher" - arose out of discussions at the 2005 NCSL conference about the "relentlessness, accountability and complexity of headship" (2007, p.8). The research explores well-being, work-life balance, stress and job satisfaction. Thirty-four heads with a wide range of experience and time in role were involved in a study whose three stage methodology gathered data from journal entries, observation of a working day and interviews. Analysis identified eight meta-categories for headteacher activity: strategic leadership, management, administration, dealing with external and internal stakeholders, continuous professional development, personal issues and various unspecified tasks. Further analysis revealed that most time was spent on administrative tasks, followed by dealing with external stakeholders and then management based-activities, mainly of school staff. Participant responses highlighted great variation in the job from day to day, with no such thing as a typical day, requiring heads to be flexible and responsive to challenges. Many of the participants wanted to change the levels of accountability, bureaucracy and demands of external agencies. The study also explored coping strategies and ways of improving work-life balance. The authors concluded that "conducting this study has reinforced the urgent need for further empirical research into the ways in which contemporary headteachers carry out their role" (Bristowe at al 2007, p.11). They identify the importance of distributed leadership, the prioritising of personal and professional lives, and being able to deal confidently with difficult staff, parent and student issues as important factors in successfully functioning as a head.

A factor related to the experience of headteachers is recruitment and retention. Heads up: Meeting the Challenge of Headteacher Recruitment (Future Leaders Trust, 2016) reports on the difficulties of recruiting headteachers. The report includes stark figures: the 2015 Governors Report states that 43% of the 4,383 respondents said it was hard to find good quality staff to fill senior positions. There is an increased negative perception of the role, with fewer heads willing to recommend the role to others. The study goes on to state that the issue of headteacher recruitment is at its worst since the 1980s and that perceptions of the role must change.

MacBeath (2009), commenting on the recruitment and retention of headteachers in Scotland, surveyed 1137 headteachers. Responses revealed a demanding and varied job, with a number of disincentives for deputies and others willing to take up the role. These include the high visibility of the role, long hours, a toll on personal and family life, loss of contact with students and small financial recompense. At the same time, headteachers were able to identify considerable rewards in the job, including that of seeing children develop and learn.

Research into the experiences of newly appointed headteachers is consistent in identifying the stresses, strains and pleasures of the role. Weindling and Dimmock reviewed studies of such, noting that there is not much change in the challenges reported. They observe that "beginning a principalship for the first time is an exciting, exhilarating, but complex and difficult experience" (2006, p.326). Some of the key challenges include managing transition from the previous head, leading change in already established cultures, dealing with ineffective staff and improving the image of the school. Hobson, Brown, Ashby, Keys, Sharp and Benefield (2003) undertook a

systematic review of the problems and support strategies of new headteachers, commissioned by the NCSL. In addition to the experiences above, they identified key problems being professional isolation, managing multiple tasks and priorities, dealing with premises issues and implementing new government initiatives.

Early et al (2011) interviewed six new headteachers and six more experienced heads, focusing on urban schools. There was often pressure on these heads to improve poor performing or failing schools. Interviewees reported that not knowing staff teams inhibited the sharing and delegation of leadership in the first stages of their headship, with experiences conforming to Gabbaro's model of "taking charge" (1987); the first six months were characterised as "taking hold" and the second involved "immersion" in the social and task matrix of the school. Preparation for the role was felt to be important and helpful but could not prepare new heads for the extreme loneliness of the role, which came as a shock. Mentoring and other forms of support were felt to be important and MacBeath (2011) comments that the benefit of a "listening ear" (p.118) is not to be discounted, especially in the face of "the unremitting nature of change... It was less the imperative of change that sapped energy and enthusiasm but the source of the change, driven by external demands, undermining the latitude and discretion of headteachers to exercise the leadership talents for which they were recruited" (2011, p.107).

These studies considered the experience of headteachers in the round. This study argues that the absence of attention to unconscious processes – in the individual and the system - misses a source of information and focus of intervention. People bring to work conscious and unconscious agendas that influence their experiences considerably.

<u>Stress</u>

There have been several studies exploring teacher stress (Kyriacou, 1987; Kyriacou, 2001; Friedman, 2000; Precey, 2015) but fewer into headteacher stress. Cooper and Kelly's (1993) study of occupational stress in headteachers was the first to explore stress and to identify higher stress levels in primary headteachers. Phillips et al (2007) note that "to date, it is the only study whose findings have sufficient external validity to be applicable to all headteachers" (p.368) but add that its relevance was limited because it pre-dates the 1988 ERA. A 2000 survey by the National Association of Head Teachers (cited in Tucker, 2013) suggested an increase in stress levels among heads and that a third of absences were due to work-related stress. Furthermore, 40% of those who responded had visited their GP with stress related symptoms. 25% felt they had experienced depression, hyper tension or insomnia. 20% felt they drank too much, with 15% reporting that they were alcoholics.

Hepburn and Brown (2001) make the interesting point that stress has become an individualised construct within a teacher narrative, which effaces the more systemic causes of stress within the teaching profession. Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor and Millet et al (2005) rank ordered occupational stress across 26 professions. They concluded that "teachers are experiencing higher stress levels and lower job satisfaction levels than both headteachers and teaching assistants, neither of whom are above the norm on any of the factors" (2005, p. 184-5). Later studies seem to challenge this assertion, however. Daniels and French (2006), in a study exploring the work load of education leaders, observe that "it is almost universally the case that problems of controlling workloads and securing a work-life balance are far greater for head, deputy head and assistant headteachers" (p.3).

Phillips et al (2007) studied work related stress (WRS) in headteachers, surveying 290 primary and secondary headteachers in West Sussex. They compared headteachers against a general population norm (GPN) and a managerial/professional peer group norm (MPN), as well as by school type and gender. They reported WRS in 43% of respondent population: that is headteachers reporting that their job was "extremely or very stressful" (2007, p. 369), with OFSTED/HMI inspections, new legislation and maintaining standards as the main stressors. They were significantly more stressed compared to GPN and MPN groups in relation to work overload and work-life balance but less so in relation to work relationships and job security, as well as control, communication and resource issues.

Further analysis of headteacher stress reveals that men and secondary headteachers report lower levels of stress and higher job satisfaction (Phillips et al 2007). Primary heads and female headteachers reported higher stress levels, something that supports prior research by Cooper and Kelly (1993), Chaplain (2001) and Fotinatos and Cooper (2004). Coleman, (2005) observes that expectations of male and female responsibilities outside of work likely contribute to this, with female household responsibility also affecting work-life balance. She suggests this is an area that merits further study. There are no studies that explore headteacher stress in relation to race. Phillips et al (ibid) identify a weakness in their study, suggesting that respondents may have been a "survivor population" as the most stressed may have already resigned or retired. In a follow-up study (Phillips, Sen and McNamee, 2008) the most important predictor for WRS was a teaching commitment of less than five hours per week, with the authors commenting that "teaching is the vocation that led headteachers into their profession".

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Female and primary school headteachers were at greater risk of poor mental and physical health, as was living alone. A key finding from this and other studies is that secondary headteachers report lower levels of WRS and poor mental and physical health than their primary peers. One explanation for this is that secondary schools have a greater number of managerial levels and therefore more leadership peers to relate to (Phillips et al 2007). As a survey based, quantitative study, this gives powerful headline data. What is lacking are more in-depth studies into the emotional experiences of headteachers and reasons why they are affected by the job in more individualistic ways. This studies is an attempt at exploring individual experiences in greater detail.

<u>Resilience and well being</u>

Concerns around recruitment and retention have led to interest in what can help headteachers survive and prosper. Day, Stobart, Sammons, Kington, Gu, Smees, and Mujtaba (2006) suggested that teachers perceive well-being as "the state of feeling healthy and happy" (p.50). Gambles, Lewis and Rapaport (2006) go further, describing it as something that is more than simply the absence of stress or illness, but rather involves positive enjoyment and pleasure" (p.37). Resilience is a separate but related concept: "a convenient label to describe things that bounce back" (Patterson and Kelleher, 2005, p.1).

Woods' (2002) study, "Enchanted Headteachers", sought to learn from headteachers who had "managed to maintain their drive and commitment over a prolonged period of headship" (2002, p. 3) and identified optimism, emotional involvement and enjoyment as keep factors in acquiring well-being. Recognising that the role can positively influence the lives of others is seen as important (Pass, 2009; Bristowe et al, 2007).

Other researchers have commented on the importance of work-life balance and time for reflection and professional networking (Patterson, 2006; Pass, 2009; Steward, 2014). Harris (2007) cautions that mechanically emulating Goleman's (1998) emotional competencies is not sufficient and that it is important to gain a "deep inner awareness" (Harris, 2007, p.5) which is consonant with the practice of psychoanalytic therapies and coaching (Brunning & Jarrett, 2006; Kets de Vries, 2006). Values are important in energising headteachers (Bristowe et al, 2007; Sunley and Locke, 2010), with Patterson and Kelleher describing them as a "well-spring of spiritual energy" (2005, p110).

Steward (2014) explored a range of factors that might sustain emotional resilience in school leaders. In her interview of six headteachers she identified that *how* a teacher interprets the role is a significant factor in remaining resilient, alongside self-awareness, self-management and self-confidence. Values and moral purpose were also important, with the desire to make a difference giving energy and strength. She also explored early life influences on identity and self-image. She observes that heads who are not able to acknowledge their shadow sides "will hide those aspects even from themselves and use energy hiding them from others" (ibid. p.64), which can have detrimental consequences for leaders, followers and the school as a whole. She concludes with recommendations for developing resilience in headteachers, including raising the profile of emotional resilience, involving governors in supporting headteachers in evaluating their own emotional resilience and the promotion of coaching for heads.

Psychoanalytic studies of Schools and Headteachers

There have been relatively few studies using a specifically psychoanalytic approach to head teachers and/or schools in general. Hinshelwood raised the question "do

unconscious processes affect educational institutions?" (Hinshelwood 2009), noting that is an area ripe for further study. Dunning, James and Jones (2005) used case studies to explore the concept of splitting and projection between various school sub-systems. Ramvi (2007) studied how the relational work of teaching can lead to unhelpful social defences affecting teacher identity and concludes that the antidote is a form of organisational containment that allows these anxieties to be recognised and worked through.

Within Educational Psychology several recent studies apply psychoanalytic theory to educational matters. Hulusi and Maggs (2015) discussed the impact of containment on teachers. Pellegrini (2010) explored how a knowledge of the unconscious process of splitting and projection could be helpful in developing Educational Psychology practice with family-school systems. Eloquin (2016a) has considered how EPs could use systems-psychodynamics to consider organisational dysfunction in schools and offer consultancy to headteachers and leadership teams. These studies open up new directions in practice and thinking. They are, however, limited to small case studies and work is necessary to establish more explicitly the effectiveness of these approaches for EPs.

There has been even less research into the unconscious shaping of headteachers' role and conduct. Tucker, (2013) used a psychoanalytically orientated methodology to explore the lived experiences of six primary school teachers, using the heuristic tool of "the organisation in the mind" to investigate how teachers responded to massive changes in school legislation and its impact on professional identity. He subsequently explored how defence mechanisms in headteachers can lead to wider organisational

defences in the school-as-a-whole (Tucker, 2015). Eloquin (2016b) has described in psychoanalytic terms the tendency towards narcissism in a headteacher and the impact that such "totalitarian" cultures can have on staff and students, including retention, moral, and academic attainment.

This section of the literature review has considered aspects of leadership theory relevant to the role of the headteacher. It then explored the everyday experiences of headteachers, channelling down into their emotional experiences before considering the prevalence of stress, as well as resilience and well-being. Finally, studies of schools and headteachers using a psychoanalytic and/or systems-psychodynamic lens were considered. The next section will consider the theoretical literature informing this study.

Theoretical review

Psychoanalysis

This section will review the theoretical aspects of psychoanalytic and systems-psychodynamic thinking pertinent to this study. It is not a full exposition of either.

Psychoanalysis began with Freud's "discovery" (Ellenberger 1970) of the unconscious in his work with "neurotics" and "hysterics" in the 1880s. Through his work as a neurologist he elaborated, over time, a tripartite model of human functioning – the id, ego and super-ego (Freud, 1920) – that held that a considerable aspect of a person's felt experience was below conscious awareness; the unconscious. The unconscious is the repository for difficult, painful and unbearable urges, drives and related experiences. While consciously forgotten, these experiences continue to influence current behaviour

and feeling (ibid). Psychoanalysis, starting with a focus on individual pathology, developed to offer accounts of the everyday life, group behaviour, religion and civilisation (Freud, 1922, 1927, 1930).

Central to Freud's theory of the unconscious is the concept of defence mechanisms. These are psychological processes by which one part of the mind prevents disturbing psychological material from being consciously apprehended: it is blocked and returned to the unconscious. Freud developed the tools of dream analysis and free association as means of identifying, tangentially, what were the concerning emotional issues impairing a person's mental and emotional life. The "latent" material acquired from dream accounts and the uninterrupted flow of free associations could be interpreted as "references to the past, and childhood sexual preoccupations. Those items in the patient's thought which came next to each other in the time sequence were deemed to have a linked meaning" (Hinshelwood, 1994 p. 12). This is the foundation for the Free Association Narrative Interview used in this study: that aspects of an unconscious concern inform one's thoughts, feelings and behaviour and can be discerned through analysis of latent material in the interview.

Building on, and subsequently departing from, Freud's thinking, Klein pioneered the "object relations theory" school of psychoanalysis, drawing on her clinical work with very young children (Klein, 1988a; 1988b). She developed ideas about how the external world is interpreted and symbolised through "objects" (Waddell, 1998). These are not necessarily exact replicas of how mothers, fathers, teachers (and bosses) might be but, rather, caricatures, passed through the emotional lens of felt experience. A baby who has repeated experiences of being cared for and thought about will take in

(introject) these experiences. As Waddell notes, 'as such experiences are repeated, the baby will feel that he has a source of goodness within, which he feels to be some kind of concrete present, one which is part of him and not only something which is offered to him from without. He has a good relationship to a good "object"' (Waddell, 1998, p. 14). Thus, experiences of infancy and early years come to be represented unconsciously through good and bad objects in the mind.

Object relations theory distinguishes two discrete states of mind that are developmental and sequential but are also contingent on emotionality and the type of care experiences a person has had (Hinshelwood, 1994). The first and most primitive mind-state is the "paranoid-schizoid position" (Klein 1946; Waddell, 1998). Here the internal and external objects are arranged, "split", into extreme polarities – good and bad, for example, with no possibility of the two being brought together. The foundation for this is held to be in the infant's experiences of a "good" present mother and a "bad" denying mother, who is assumed to be causing the somatic discomforts of experiences such as hunger and cold by purposefully denying her presence. With time and "good enough care" the infant is able to reconcile these polarities and recognise that both the "good" present/loving figure and the "bad" absent/denying figure are one and the same, and, importantly, to experience some guilt about the rage projected towards her. In Kleinian theory, this leads to the second of the two mind-states, the "depressive" position.

The depressive situation is a state in which the mind can recognise and take responsibility for its own hateful feelings towards an object and tolerate the uncertainty of a life lived beyond the artificial comfort of binaries. It is in the depressive position that the ego can achieve a form of psychological maturity and recognise the part it plays

in its own drama. The world is no longer separated into good and bad; it is seen as a spectrum of experience in which one can be hurt but can, equally, hurt and in which one must, to mitigate guilt and anxiety, make reparations, either in actual fact or symbolically. While there is a developmental scope to these states, it is observed that individuals at all life stages oscillate between the two states. External and internal pressures are key factors in this and, with reference to this study, leaders and managers can exist and operate from either state (Krantz, 2006).

These two distinct states have a central task of managing anxiety. To this, end a variety of defence mechanisms, ways of warding of the intrusion of anxiety into consciousness, are deployed by the ego. A central defence from the paranoid-schizoid position is the multi-step process of splitting, projection and projective identification. This entails the separating (splitting) of some undesirable or unpleasant aspect of the psyche and "exporting" or projecting this aspect out and identifying it in others. While defence mechanisms are intended to limit the impact of anxiety (Shaw, 2002), paranoid-schizoid defences do so in such an extreme way that they can be as disruptive as the anxiety itself. Depressive defences, like humour or sublimation, reduce the intensity of anxiety while still allowing the issue to be thought about: they can be seen as more sophisticated responses to anxiety.

A final point, with reference to projection, is its culmination in projective identification. This is a process with a range of functions: *as a defence against* unwanted feelings (by projecting them out of the self), a type of relationship (it links the projector and projectee) and as a form of communication, in which the recipient comes to experience

something of the emotional state of the projector. (Ogden, 1982; Moustaki-Smilansky, 1994; Waddell, 1998).

The use of psychoanalysis as a formal study of leadership began in the Second World War with an analysis of Hitler. Working for US Army Intelligence, Langer (1972), accurately predicted his attitude to defeat and manner of his suicide. More recently, and less dramatically, Kets de Vries (2006) has pioneered psychoanalytic approaches to understanding internal factors contributing to leadership and executive performance. Referring to leadership in general he notes "attitudes and interactions with people are the result of a complex confluence of their [leaders'] inner theatre (including relationships with authority figures early in life), significant life experiences, examples set by other executives and formal leadership training" (Kets de Vries, 2013). Gabriel, (2005) posits that members of organisations, including leaders, are emotional beings who seek to fulfil deeper unconscious desires. This is the central rationale of this research, in exploring both biography and the current exigencies of the headteacher role, as they experience and define it.

Contributions from Bion

Bion's contributions to psychoanalytic theory are considerable. This section will concentrate on those aspects of theory relevant to this study.

Container/Contained

A concept central to this study is that of the container/contained (Bion 1963). Bion used analyst/patient and mother/infant dyads to present a model of how thought and meaning emerge – or do not (Symington and Symington 1996). In both instances the

infant/patient seeks to rid themselves of discomfort or pain, manifested initially in violent projections (ibid). Through the containing presence of the analyst/mother's mind, these unprocessed sensory experiences can be made sense of, thought about and given meaning. It is important to note that Bion preferred to use symbols to denote container and contained as they have fewer pre-conceptions attached to them. Thus, container is represented as ♀ and contained as ♂ (Bion 1963, p.7). By utilising symbols, the theory of container/contained is able to move beyond the bounds of therapy and parenting. An analogue of relevance to this study is that of the leader being able to contain staff and organisational anxieties, allowing the task of the organisation to continue in difficult times, such as organisational change (Krantz, 2006). Crucial to the concept of containment is the ability to tolerate uncertainty. Simpson and French (2005) observe that: "the thoughtful leader works to provide containment, which involves the creation of a relational and mental space that helps in the toleration of ambiguity, uncertainty and anxiety" (2005, p.90). In short the conception of ♀♂ provides a model of how one entity can contain the somatic/emotional/psychic distress of another entity, allowing for thought and meaning to develop.

For a container to be able to contain, then, requires that it too be contained (Symington and Symington, 1996). Hulusi and Maggs (2015) explore this in relation to work group discussions with teachers, commenting that "where teachers do not feel adequately contained in their work they will not be able to provide containment to their students, who therefore in turn will not be able to engage effectively in learning" (p.35). They suggest that Educational Psychologists are well placed to offer this support: to contain the containers. A key focus of this study flows from this question: what contains

headteachers, who, as leaders, contain the psychic life of the school, allowing for the task of learning to occur?

This study is interested in two possible factors that might explain headteacher capacity in this regard: first is the experiences of the individual as considered through object relations theory. It is for this reason that part of the study focuses on participants' biographical accounts and the key experiences that shaped them. A psychoanalytic framework is used because it allows for transference and projective data – that is material from the unconscious –to be used. A second factor is role conception - of finding, making and taking a role fully (Reed, 1997). Inhabiting a role fully is not a confining experience but rather one that permits, through the existence of clear, containing boundaries and clarity of task, a lively engagement: "a role, with its specific boundary and limit… links us directly to a purpose on the one side and to our co-workers on the other" (Hirsschorn, 1988, p. 56). A well-conceived role serves to contain anxieties related to the role and the task it serves.

A theory of thinking

Building on ♀♂, Bion elaborated an abstract theory of how thoughts and thinking develop. In the psychoanalytic encounter, it is the analyst's ability to contain unbearable "facts" and render them bearable enough for the patient to face that leads to change: "the mind grows through exposure to truth" (Symington and Symington, p.3). The theory of alpha function (Bion, 1962) asserts that it is not a thinker who thinks thoughts but rather a thought already exists that "seeks out a thinker". Bion's highly abstract theoretical model suggests the existence of beta elements, "sense impressions devoid of meaning or nameless sensations which cause frustration" (Symington and

Symington, 1996, p.62). This is the unbearable emotional material requiring containment, the raw material that can be mined for thoughts, once a thinker can hold them. This capacity to think about and make sense of these impressions is termed "alpha function": it is what a mind does to sense data to "make sense" of them, converting them into alpha elements:

it seemed convenient to suppose an alpha function to convert sense data into alpha elements and thus provide the psyche with the material for dream thought and hence the capacity to wake up or to go to sleep, to be conscious or unconscious.
(Bion, 1962, p. 115).

While Bion was chiefly concerned with clinical psychoanalysis and the treatment of psychotic patients, the relevance and application of a theoretical alpha function for leaders is evident. Simpson and French, 2006 explore the idea of "thought" leadership and argue that keeping and developing the capacity for leaders to think requires the ability to contain the pressures that cause dispersal into thoughtless activity. Leaders also need the capacity to recognise and work with difficult thoughts in a way that faces challenges to their organisations. A final challenge is encouraging others in the organisation to think as well, so that they can contribute fully to the organisational task.

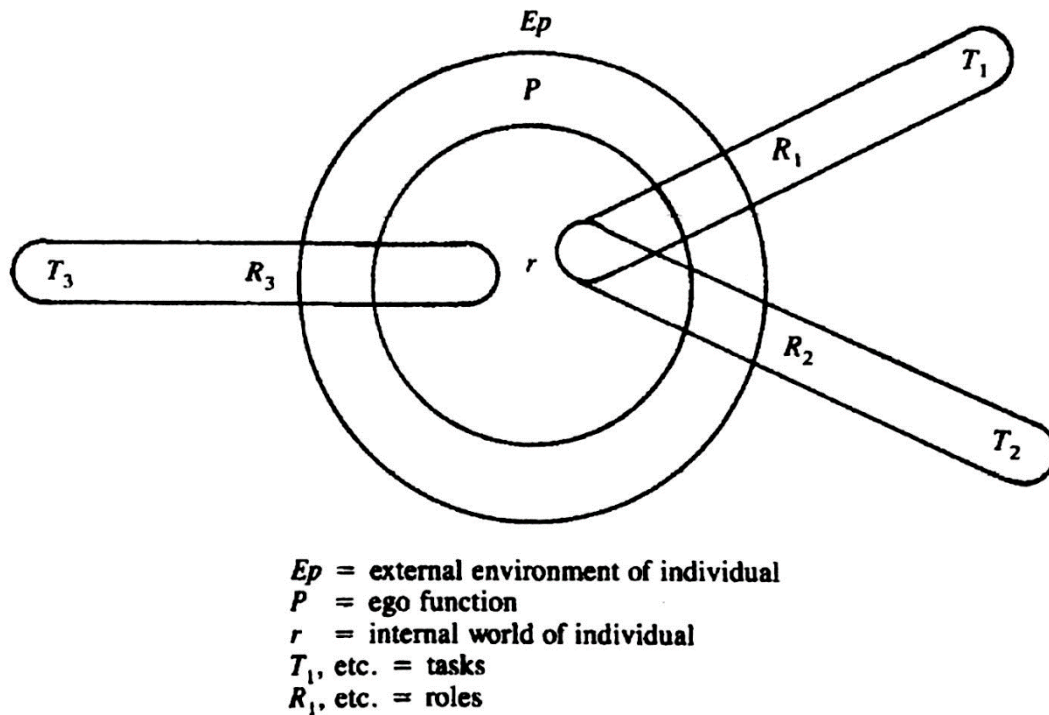**<u>Open systems theory of organisational and individual functioning</u>**

Open-systems theory originally studied biological systems (von Bertanlaanfy, 1969). Rice (1953, 1969) applied the theory to organisations and, drawing on object-relations theory, to individuals in organisations, exploring related constructs of role and task (Roberts, 1994). An open-system is an entity that has permeable boundary that permits

it to take in resources, convert them and export them in a different form. In an organisation, resources are used to address the primary task, "the task the system must carry out in order to survive" (Roberts, 1994, p.29) and individuals within the organisation are accorded roles to facilitate task completion.

Boundaries are an important feature in an open-system and Rice draws parallels between the ego functioning as the boundary of the individual and the leader holding a boundary function for an organisation (Rice, 1969). In the case of the former, object-relations theory is used to make sense of the inner world of the individual and to examine the ability of the ego to regulate passage between an individual's inner and outer worlds. An example of this would be how projective processes and other defence mechanisms lead to realistic or phantasy relations with reality. This point has bearing on this study, as the dual focus is both role conception and biography (the foundations of an individual's object relations).

In his seminal paper "Individual, Group and Inter-group Processes "(1969) Rice considers the application of open-systems theory to individuals and organisations. He provides two novel approaches to this, using diagrammatic models and forms of quasi-algebraic equation. The model this study is indebted to represents the individual in the organisation, considering environment, task, role and intra-psychic factors. Rice describes the individual as a "multi-task system" (Fig 1). The constituent parts will be discussed in turn.

Figure 1: multi-task system

Ep = external environment of individual
P = ego function
r = internal world of individual
T_1, etc. = tasks
R_1, etc. = roles

The internal world of the individual, *r*, is, essentially, the unconscious and follows object relations theory. *P* is the ego function, the barrier or boundary region that "mediates the relationship between the external and internal world and thus takes, in relation to the individual, a leadership role and exercises a management control function" (Rice, 1969: 574). *P* and *r*, then comprise the system and sub-systems of the individual, as well as resources (intellectual, emotional and physical abilities, attitudes, values and beliefs, for example) that the ego deploys to meet tasks.

Any open-system must engage with its environment, *Ep*, in order to survive. Scanning for threats and resources is a critical part of individual and organisational survival (Emery and Trist, 1969). The activities that permit it to survive and flourish are the tasks undertaken, which take resources from the environment and convert them into something beneficial to the individual. Roles, *R*, signify the behaviours displayed and

the internal resources of the individual accessed to carry out the task. In the earliest days of humanity, when survival was a critical issue, the task might be to catch food and the role would therefore be "hunter", accessing internal resources from experience, memory and intelligence.

Applying this model to organisations, Rice demonstrates how roles, depending on the task, may use more or less of an individual's internal resources. Too little leads to boredom and disengagement, such as repetitive manual labour. Too much can lead to stress and burn out, as too great an amount of the resource pool is given over to the task. In leadership and managerial jobs, there is often more than one task and therefore more than one role. If the tasks are not dissimilar (*T1* and *T2*), the roles overlap (*R1* and *R2*). Similar aspects of the self are used. However, when the environment changes to the extent that the organism must develop substantially new tasks to successfully interact with it (*T3*), a new role (*R3*) must be established. This can be a challenging and painful process as the individual must seek out new resource pools, "digging deep" into the self. The model explains the difficulties of first time heads in taking up a role (Early et al, 2011) and also explains phenomena such as role suction and role creep (Handy, 1976) as a way to avoid anxiety and seek comfort by returning to older more familiar and comforting roles. In such cases the task has shifted from engaging with the environment to alleviating anxiety. This is another way of describing individual and organisational defence mechanisms (Menzies, 1960).

Rice's model also serves to describe the function of a leader of an organisation, where the leader acts as the ego boundary, *P*, directing various internal resources (e.g. staff) to take up specific roles in order to complete tasks required for survival in whatever

environment the organisation exists. A simple example would be a head teacher scanning the educational environment and moving a teacher from one subject to another (say, from dance to English) to head off the threat of poor GCSE English grades. While headteachers have not been explored using an open-systems framework, Davies (1982) has explored how the role of teacher acts as a boundary in the classroom, managing anxieties and permitting learning to occur in higher education. Roberts (1994) has applied open-systems theory to systemic dysfunction in health settings and Morgan (1986) demonstrates the applicability of the approach across a number of organisational types.

This study utilises this model to explore the concept of role for headteachers, exploring how it connects the individual to the organisation via roles that complete organisational tasks. The research question will now be discussed before describing the research methodology.

<u>Research Question</u>

The above review indicates this is a rich field for further exploration. The following research design will explore the conscious and unconscious, social and psychological factors informing how head-teachers conceptualise their role and use it to make sense of the task at hand and manage the stresses evoked, externally and internally by the task.

An overarching question, under which all subsequent questions rest is:

- How do unconscious factors shape role conception in managing the demands and pressures of the role of secondary head teachers?

Methodology

This section describes the aims and purpose of this research. It goes on to discuss the methodology used, considering the orientation, epistemology and ontology taken up to interview three secondary headteacher. It explores role, biography and unconscious methods of managing work related stressors. The research strategy is described, including interview procedure, data gathering and data analysis. A detailed discussion of the specific approach used – the free association narrative interview – is also given. Ethical considerations are also discussed, as are issues pertaining to data storage.

Purpose and aims

The purpose of this research is exploratory (Robson, 2002). It utilises a psychosocial framework and methodology to explore the conscious and unconscious factors that shape how headteachers take up their role and relate to the organisation as a whole. As part of this exploration, biographical elements are also explored as a possible source of information as to how roles are taken up and why.

This research is intended to offer insight into the experience of secondary headteachers in relation to the demands of the role. It has relevance and implications for headteachers as a group, including their training and transition into headship, and for those working with them, including EPs. There will also be an emancipatory aspect to this research as well: the space to allow busy headteachers to consider and reflect on previously unrecognised influences that drew them to the profession and shaped the type of leader they have become.

Research framework

This study assumes a psychosocial framework and methodology, following the work of Hollway and Jefferson (2013). It considers the way headteacher role, as a device for managing work-related pressures and stresses, is informed by biographical experiences. This study is influenced by psychoanalysis and open-systems theory, which gives its psychological perspective additional explanatory power.

This research proposes the following:

i.   A non-unitary, defended subject. That is, individuals have conscious and unconscious components to their mental life, which have qualitatively different modes and logics. Furthermore, anxiety is proposed to play a large part in the emotional/mental life of all individuals and unconscious defences are mobilised to displace or minimise the conscious awareness of anxiety and its causes. It is these that lead to defensive manoeuvres in interviews. For example, changing the subject if the topic is experienced as anxiety provoking, either consciously or unconsciously.

ii.   The existence of a dynamic unconscious that shapes identity and narratives about the present and the past, as well as an individual's behaviours.

iii.   An individual biography that shapes the unconscious and how individuals relate to themselves, others and the world – including the world of work.

Ontology

Ontologically, this research assumes a quasi-realist position. It is influenced by the work of Brakel (2013), who proposed a new form of "reductive physicalism" in her work on the intersection between experimental philosophy, neurobiology and

psychoanalysis. This position holds that the unconscious is not simply a social construct but rather an objectively verifiable entity (see for example, Solms, 2015). Experiences in infancy and early childhood form, in the Kleinian model, objects that can be thought of as malign or benign caricatures of key figures and experiences of maternal care. These unconsciously shape that individual's emotional and perceptual world. Brakel proposes that these states are made up of neuronal activity and argues that mental states are underpinned by physical neural connections. She uses phobias as an example of this and distinguishes between the different neural assemblies resembling differing phobic triggers and the relatively static neural structure of the phobic response that these triggers lead to.

This is not to say that some aspects of life are not socially constructed, or that interpretation, with the possibility of multiple interpretations of a single event, are not possible. Rather, once interpreted, the way these memories and experiences are stored in the mind has a physical component. Rohner's parental acceptance/rejection theory (1986) supports this position. PARTheory holds that, regardless of variations in culture, gender, age, ethnicity or other such defining factors, children long for and need a specific positive response – acceptance – from parents and caregivers. Rohner (1986) notes the debilitating effects of rejection and observes that the *perception of rejection* has the same effect as actual rejection. Thus, perceptions of events, regardless of intention and what objectively happened, have long term emotional (and following Brakel, 2013) physical implications for mental and neural development.

The existence of an unconscious, therefore, raises significant epistemological questions. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) observe that a number of qualitative methods cannot allow for the inconsistencies in narrative presented by defended subjects and tend to analyse data at the surface level. Psychoanalysis developed as an approach designed to reveal just these deeper, unconscious processes through the use of free association, transference/countertransference and other methods. Hollway and Jefferson (2013), following Devereux (1967), argue that "psychoanalysis should be seen as first and foremost and epistemology and a methodology" (Devereaux, 1967, p.294). Psychoanalysis, therefore, is not just a treatment but an epistemology in and of itself; a method for exploring and revealing unconscious processes with a repertoire of techniques and methods specifically designed for this task. This study will employ a psychoanalytic epistemology to explore the experiences, underlying emotional states and internal objects relations of headteachers in relation to their role and organisation.

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was selected for this research. Such a methodology is well suited to research exploring the meanings behind experiences of individuals (Eatough, 2012). Eatough further notes that qualitative researchers "deliberately adopt an attitude of openness towards topics they investigate" (2012, P.333). This allows qualitative research to remain open to uncertainty and ambiguity, two qualities that are strongly linked to psychosocial research and specifically to the work of Bion (1963). An additional reason for the selection of a qualitative research method is that it permits interviews to be conducted in naturalistic settings (Eatough, 2012). While some positivist approaches strongly emphasise a laboratory setting to ensure control of

variables, the specific psychosocial methodology used here actively considers all aspects of an encounter – including the environment, how one is greeted, emotional experiences, for example – as relevant emotional data (Armstrong, 2005).

<u>Data gathering</u>

Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed twice with an interval of 1 to 4 weeks. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The first interview, which explored the "here and now" experience of being a headteacher began with a request for an organisational drawing, which became the springboard for subsequent discussion. The second interview explored biography.

Semi-structured interviewing is a recognised form of qualitative research methodology (Breakwell, 2012). Breakwell (ibid, p.369) notes it is an "infinitely flexible tool for research. It can encompass other techniques [and]… is not tied to any one theory, epistemological orientation (whether constructivist or positivist) or philosophical tradition." It has been used in previous research projects using psychosocial approaches notably Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and more recently within Educational Psychology (Reichardt, 2016; Keaney, 2017).

Within this study it offered additional flexibility due to new developments in the interviewing process. As noted in the Literature section, this research is strongly influenced by the Bionian concept of "container/contained" (1963). As the interview process developed, the researcher became more adept at using transference/countertransference experiences (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013) to inform

and guide the interview process. Bion's conception of entering a therapeutic encounter without "memory or desire" (Bion, 1967), while not possible or desirable in a research situation, led to the researcher "letting go" of certain preconceived questions and following the emotional undertow of the interview in the here and now. A further source of data gathering is the use of notes before and after interviews, chronicling the researcher's thoughts, feelings and associations. The use of a psychosocial framework and the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) are discussed in more detail below.

Rationale for a psychosocial framework

This research uses a specifically psychosocial framework and methodology, with particular reference to psychoanalytic theories of Klein (1988a; 1988b) and Bion (Bion, 1963, 1967; Symington and Symington, 1996). Hollway and Jefferson (2013) note that there has been a steady growth in researchers using this methodology, observing that this is especially the case for those with "psychoanalytically based training, engaging in research perhaps in pursuit of higher professional qualifications" (2013, p.xiv). Psychosocial research, as used in this study, seeks to make links between a social world "out there" and the individual, internal world – the psychology – of the subject. Frosh and Baraitser (2008) state that psychosocial studies "focus on conceptualising and researching a type of subject that is both social and psychological, which, constituted through social formations, it is still granted agency and internality" (page 349). Gadd and Jefferson (2007, p. 4) state that psychosocial methodology involves "conceptualising human subjects as, simultaneously, the products of their own unique psychic worlds and a shared social world". From the point of view of this research, the dual focus afforded by a psychosocial methodology, allows attention to be paid to both

the social and the psychological aspects of an individual taking up the role of headteacher.

Psychosocial research, particularly the use of psychoanalytic methods, is not without criticism. For example, Wetherell (2003, p.113) identified "the problematic ethics of diagnosing character" and the potential for an imbalance of power when a participant is given an identity by the researcher "which [they] might not recognise and may want to strongly repudiate" (2003, p.169). The criticism that psychoanalysis is "an undemocratic dialogue between analyst and analysand" (Holloway and Jefferson, 2013, p.156) can also be levelled against the power relations inherent in the FANI, although they identify measures to counter this, discussed below.

Another criticism is that psychoanalysis is too individualising and that the psychoanalyst can all too easily takes up a position of expert knowledge, making assumptions about human nature which are hard to refute (Frosh and Barrister, 2008). Following from this is the assertion that psychoanalysis should be solely the province of trained psychoanalysts who use it specifically within a clinical setting. This line of reasoning argues that a psychoanalytic methodology is not compatible with research outside of the clinical encounter. The refutation of this is found in the work of Freud himself, notably in the use of psychoanalysis to critique, for example, constructs such as religion (1927) and civilisation (1930).

Psychosocial Methodology: Theoretical Underpinnings

This research utilises psychoanalytic theory in the consideration of the psychological component of role, specifically ideas from Klein (1988a, 1988b) and Bion (1962;

1963). Within qualitative research, psychoanalytic approaches have been used as a specific approach (Kvale, 1999), while others have developed a psychoanalytically orientated psychosocial methodology (Frosh and Baraister, 2008; Hoggett, Beedell, Mayo, Jiminez and Miller, 2010) Psychosocial methodologies have also been used in the field of Educational Psychology (Reichardt, 2016, Keaney, 2017) and in the study of primary headteachers responses to change (Tucker, 2013). The Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) procedure developed by Hollway and Jefferson (2013), described below, has its origins in two key psychoanalytic assumptions: first that interview subjects are likely to be defended subjects and; second, that unconscious preoccupations are not easily surfaced and that the free association of ideas and comments can indicate the existence and nature of such preoccupations. Both these ideas deserve elaboration.

The defended subject

A central tenet of psychoanalytic thinking is that the self, or ego, is forged out of unconscious defences against anxiety (Freud, 1920; Klein 1988a, 1988b). Following Freud, Klein (1946) explored how this occurs at the very beginning of life, when an infant is confronted for the first time by physical discomfort (hunger, cold, discomfort) and experiences dependency on something outside of its control for survival. Dependency stimulates anxieties. These are extreme at first but in time and with "good enough care" the anxiety becomes moderated by the experience of care and by the mediating quality of language (Waddell, 1998). As a way of managing anxiety, defence mechanisms develop (Klein, 1988a, 1988b; Vaillant and Vaillant, 1986) ranging from the most primitive and infantile to more mature processes that allow anxiety to be moderated or even mastered, with greater proximity to reality. As the ego develops,

idiosyncratic ways of managing anxiety crystallise into personality structures, shaping how each individual responds to and manages anxiety, challenge and stress. The primary task of any defence mechanism is to prevent the ego – self – from being overwhelmed by excessive and unmanageable anxiety to the point where it can no longer function. Much of the anxiety and its original source is, therefore, kept out of conscious awareness: it is unconscious. This allows the ego to function more or less successfully. Primitive defence mechanisms include processes such as splitting, projection and projective identification (Klein, 1946; Hinshelwood 1994; Pellegrini, 2010). As the ego develops, more mature defences can be acquired and utilised, such as humour, intellectualisation, sublimation and others (Stapley, 2006).

In both primitive and mature defence mechanisms the purpose is to ensure the continuing function of the ego by diminishing, displacing or symbolically reworking the anxiety, all below conscious awareness. The more primitive a defence, the more its focus is on relieving anxiety in the immediate and short-term. In the long term such procedures may be counter-productive: for example, perpetually blaming others and identifying them as a source of one's own distress inevitably has long-term, counter-productive consequences.

Hollway and Jefferson draw on the above theory to develop their concept of a "defended subject" (2013, p.17), departing from the "assumption that the self is a single unit, with unproblematic boundaries separating from the external world of objects (both people and things)" (ibid). They recognise that some of the factors influencing a person's behaviour are rooted in anxiety and are, therefore, unconscious. This research

holds that headteachers can be viewed as defended subjects, due to the reported stresses, pressures and anxieties they experience (Phillips et al 2007; Tucker, 2013).

Free association

The concept of a dynamic unconscious which uses defence mechanisms to keep anxiety-raising preoccupations away from conscious awareness raises challenges about how to access these preoccupations and reveal deeper non-linear accounts that differ from more conscious "well-worn" narratives (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p.151). It is for this reason that the free association of ideas, words and images came to be seen as a key interpretive device in classical psychoanalysis (Ellenberger, 1970). It is an approach that is able to identify an unconscious thread linking statements, ideas and images that, on the surface at least, are unrelated. This is because the unconscious mind operates very differently from the conscious mind (ibid). It is emotional, non-linear and works not so much by logic as by associations. As Hollway and Jefferson note:

by asking the patient to say whatever comes to mind, the psychoanalyst is eliciting the kind of narrative that is not structured according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic; that is, the associations follow pathways defined by emotional motivations rather than rational intention. (2013, P.34)

While traditionally free association is the province of the clinical setting, Hollway and Jefferson argue that it has considerable relevance and applicability in the research situation as well, allowing for a richer, emotionally suffused participant narrative:

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By eliciting a narrative structured according to the principles of free association, therefore, we secure access to a person's concerns, which would probably not be visible using a more traditional method. (2013, p.34)

The use of free associations in the research process opens up new fields of potential data that must be considered and evaluated in different ways from traditional qualitative research procedures: "free associations defy narrative conventions and enable the analyst to pick up on "incoherences" (for example, contradictions, elisions, avoidances) and accord them due significance." (ibid.p.34)

Transference and counter-transference

One of the methods by which data derived from free associations can be evaluated and validated is through recognition of transference and countertransference in a face-to-face interview. Transference is, in its simplest form, the revival of past emotions specific to previous relations brought into a current relationship, "in the repeating, by the patient, of past experiences so that the patient imagines the attendant feelings to have been aroused by the analyst when in fact they belong to the "old disorder"". (Freud 1917, cited in de Rementaria, 2011).

Counter-transference is the analyst's reaction to the transference: "all the feelings which the analyst experiences towards his patient." (Heimann, 1950, p. 81). Initially this was viewed as an impediment to effective therapy (de Rementaria, 2011) but, as Hinshelwood notes, "countertransference underwent a remarkable metamorphosis in the 1950s" (Hinshelwood, 1991, p.255). Heimann moved from viewing it as an obstacle to conceiving of it as "one of the most important tools for his (sic) work. The

analyst's counter-transference is an instrument of research into the patient's unconscious." (Heimann, 1950, p.82).

Originally transference and counter-transference were held to exist (or at least be identifiable) only within the analytic setting. Hollway and Jefferson assert the possibility of wider usage:

outside the clinic, it can be recognised that everybody has their own feelings, more or less available to conscious awareness, when confronted with emotionally redolent situations that trigger previous experiences (transference). These may be projected onto others as an ongoing part of everyday unconscious intersubjective dynamics where they need be felt and identified, or dis-identified, with (countertransference). (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p.159).

Discussing this experience in their own research, they produced the term "unconscious intersubjective dynamics" (ibid, p.159). Hunt (1989) provides an alternative description of the transference/counter-transference process: "using [the researchers'] subjectivity as an instrument for knowing". Within psychosocial research it is an additional source of information about what may be at play in the interview and an initiation into reflexivity (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013).

Practical implications of Bionian theory

Within a psychoanalytically informed psychosocial interview, interviewer and interviewee are engaged in a conscious and rational discussion, while at the same time they are a "dialogue of unconsciouses" (Ferenczi, 1932, in Haynal, 2002); between the

two there pass signals and communications of which neither may be aware. For both researcher and psychoanalyst, this raises questions about how such data can be registered and used.

A central task in the interviews is to be available to subtle cues and unconscious communications – as much as possible. Thus, while using a semi-structured interview format, which itself allows for questions and discussions to arise within the interview, the researcher found Bion's idea that the analyst should approach a session without "memory or desire" (Symington and Symington, 1996) useful. He did not emulate this fully, nor would it have been possible. At the same time, the researcher, on several occasions, found himself asking questions in the interview that surprised him. In initial interviews this was perturbing and viewed as poor practice. Later on, it came to be regarded as a phenomena arising out of an open, unknowing stance that entertained the possibility of two unconsciousness being in dialogue during the interview.

The indebtedness to Bion's theories has already been acknowledged and discussed. It is the intention here to denote some practical implications for methodology. This refers chiefly to the need for formal and informal supervision throughout the research process, not only as a means of ensuring deadlines are met and discussing any methodological and logical obstacles, but as a form of containment in which the difficult material could be thought about. The researcher is also a "defended subject" and within the boundaries of the research itself encountered a wide array of transferences and unconscious preoccupations from the participants, as well as anxieties about the research process itself. The experience of containment allowed for consideration of the "unthought known" (Bollas (1987). An example of this is when, following completion of three

interviews, the researcher experienced an almost paralysing inertia in relation to the research, as if too full of information to even think. Supervision helped to locate some of that inertia in the experience of interviewing headteachers who have too much to think about and too little time to think.

This links to a practical understanding of alpha function (Bion, 1962; Symington & Symington, 1996). The act of psychoanalytically informed supervision allows for the transformation of unprocessed emotional experiences (beta elements) into meaningful sequences of data (alpha elements) through the process of an active thoughtfulness in a containing situation (alpha function).

Adhering to these concepts as part of a practical methodology added a new level of integrity and validity to this research.

The Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI).

The Free Association Narrative Interview – FANI - (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013), was used in this research study as a means of accessing potential unconscious links in the statements of participants in order to register a "gestalt" of the interviews as a whole, as opposed to individually coded utterances. While there was an outline structure, governed by the over-arching research question and sub-questions that informed the semi-structured interview, the FANI encourages the use of open questions and non-directedness on the part of the interviewer. This allows for greater freedom in participant responses and for access to unconscious preoccupations that a defended subject may not be able to articulate fully or coherently.

The intention is to attend equally to the conscious rational narrative and unconscious logic: "that is, the associations follow pathways defined by emotional motivations, rather than rational intentions" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p.43). Such a focus offers a richer, deeper and less ordered narrative in comparison to data gathered by other narrative methods: "By eliciting a narrative structure according to the principles of free association, therefore, we secure access to a person's concerns, which would probably not be visible using a more traditional method." (ibid. p.43)

The FANI developed out of existing narrative approaches and the psychoanalytic clinical case study. It was influenced by the Biographical-Interpretive Method (Shutze, 1992; Rosenthal, 1993). From feminist theory it takes, as a guiding principle, an awareness of the potential for unequal power relations in research through factors such as gender, race, and class (Stanley and Wise, 1983; Maynard and Purvis, 1994). To this Hollway and Jefferson (2013) add the possible imbalance of power between a "knowing", psychoanalytically informed researcher and a participant. As antidotes they identify reflexivity, informed consent and compassion. They went through a number of pilot studies in developing the FANI, reflecting on failures and refining questioning (and listening) technique. From their trials they developed four key principles that would allow them to access a narrative gestalt, where there is "a whole that is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda" (2013, p.32). These four principals are:

1. To use open ended questions in the interview – the more open the better. The intention is to allow the participant as much leeway as possible in answering a question that, itself, does not confine the answer too closely to what the interviewer expects it to be.

2. To elicit stories. Stories anchor accounts to what has actually happened, allowing for indexicality (ibid, p.32) and limiting the likelihood of theoretical or stale narratives.

3. To avoid "why" questions. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) noted that asking why questions tends to elicit intellectualisations, rather than a response linked to actual experience.

4. To follow up using respondent's ordering and phrasing. The purpose is to follow up themes arising from the first interview in a way that does not place the interviewer's interpretation or narrative upon it: "the art and skill of the exercise is to assist the narrators to say more about their lives (to assist the emergence of gestalts)" (ibid, p.34).

Outside of the interview proper, a development of the FANI has been to include the researcher's thoughts, feelings and associations as data for consideration. The opportunity to interview headteachers in their own schools, while a potential cause of loss of objectivity, means that the initial encounter with the organisation-as-a-whole (through encounters with literature, reception, school staff) can offer an impression of the sort of culture each head has tried to create. This approach is taken from the organisational observation activity developed by the Tavistock Clinic (Hinshelwood and Skogstadt, 2000).

The Interview Procedure.

Participant selection

Participant selection was guided by requirements that the participants were not headteachers the researcher worked with or was likely to work with. The sample type was purposive. The aim was to have a range of school types (academy, local authority and faith) and gender. Two headteachers were written to directly by the researcher and one selected from a list of volunteers following an email to all heads in the researcher's county. Potential participants were written to by email and provided with an information sheet and declaration of informed consent (Appendix 1) and dates were arranged.

Interviews

At the first interview the researcher confirmed that participants had read the information sheet and understood they could withdraw at any a time, as well as reiterating that interviews would be recorded. The Declaration of Informed consent was then signed.

The first task was to undertake an organisational drawing. The instruction given was:

I would like you to draw your organisation and your role in it. This is not a piece of art and artistic skills are not important. Take some time to see what images, ideas or other associations come to mind. The only rule is that you cannot use words.

The final point was to decrease the likelihood of participants producing a simple hierarchy chart with titles.

Each participant was interviewed twice, with a gap of between one week and four weeks between interviews. Interview times are as follows:

Participant	Interview 1	Interview 2
A	65m:50s	52m:48s
B	59m:17	56m:49
C	62:14	56:19

<u>Interview Questions</u>

The overarching research question was:

"How do unconscious factors shape role conception in managing the demands and pressures of the role of secondary head teachers?"

The first interview (Interview 1) explored the experiences of headteachers "in role". The interview, following the FANI protocol, consisted of structured open questions, allowing for interviewee's responses to guide subsequent questions. Following the organisational drawing, the first question invited them to comment on the drawing. Follow-up questions were as follows:

- How do you conceive of the role of head-teacher?

- How do you relate to the school-as-a-whole and to the internal and external structures and demands placed upon it?

- What are the pressures of the role and what factors (within person, within the organisation and from without) help to manage these pressures?

The second interview (Interview 2) explored biographical factors of relevance. Follow-up questions encouraged accounts of significant moments in participants' lives ("can you tell me about a time when?") to ensure responses were anchored to real experiences.

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These allowed for the identification and extraction of "vignettes" suitable for a more sustained psychoanalytic analysis, described below. The guiding questions were:

- How did you become a teacher/ head-teacher?

- What early years and subsequent significant life events shaped your decision?

- How does your life experience and related narrative influence how you make sense of and take up your role?

Post interview

After the interview, participants were thanked, verbally and in writing. No follow up was scheduled but an offer was made to share analysis of individual participant's interviews after the analysis stage was completed.

Table 1 gives a timeline of the interview activities.

Table 1: Timeline of Interview Activities

	Activity	Focus
Identifying and informing participants	- Participants identified - Letter of introduction written and sent, including Information on study, informed consent and withdrawal procedures - Dates arranged for Interview 1 and 2	
First meeting	- Organizational Drawing - Interview 1: the current experience of begin a headteacher	Exploration of individual in role
Second Meeting (2-4 weeks after first meeting	- Interview 2: biographical exploration	Exploration of biographical factors informing unconscious and subsequent role conception
Letter of thanks written		

Data analysis

All interviews were transcribed and checked against original recordings prior to the analysis proper.

Psychosocial analysis of data raises certain questions about analysis because it takes account of the unconscious in textual interpretation. Hollway and Jefferson critique the "tell it as it is, common sense approach (2013, p.52) because "adequate meaning can only be produced from data by utilising theory and by using reflexivity" (ibid). Taking the "at face value" approach, as some data analysis methods do, limits what can be made of various contradictions, changes in tone, interruptions and much else that, in a psychosocial analysis, can be used as data and analysed.

A key principle of a psychosocial analysis of data is the principle of viewing the gestalt, or whole. By this, Hollway and Jefferson mean that the entire data set produced (including field notes, transcripts, transference/counter-transference and other forms of data) is used to assist in the interpretation of individual extracts. In order to do this, the interview in its entirety must be familiarised and "held in mind" (ibid, p. 64), permitting unconscious links to be made. This entails an immersion in the data which allows for unconscious processes to come into play, even in the researcher's dreams. As Hollway and Jefferson note, "the process of dreaming about them suggests that our developing insights into a person were not occurring at a conscious intentional level, but that unconscious processes – our fantasy life and emotions – were also working on that *Gestalt*" (ibid, p.64-65).

Taking the data set as a gestalt informs how links are made between single utterances and the whole and also how themes may be interrelated. For example, a change of
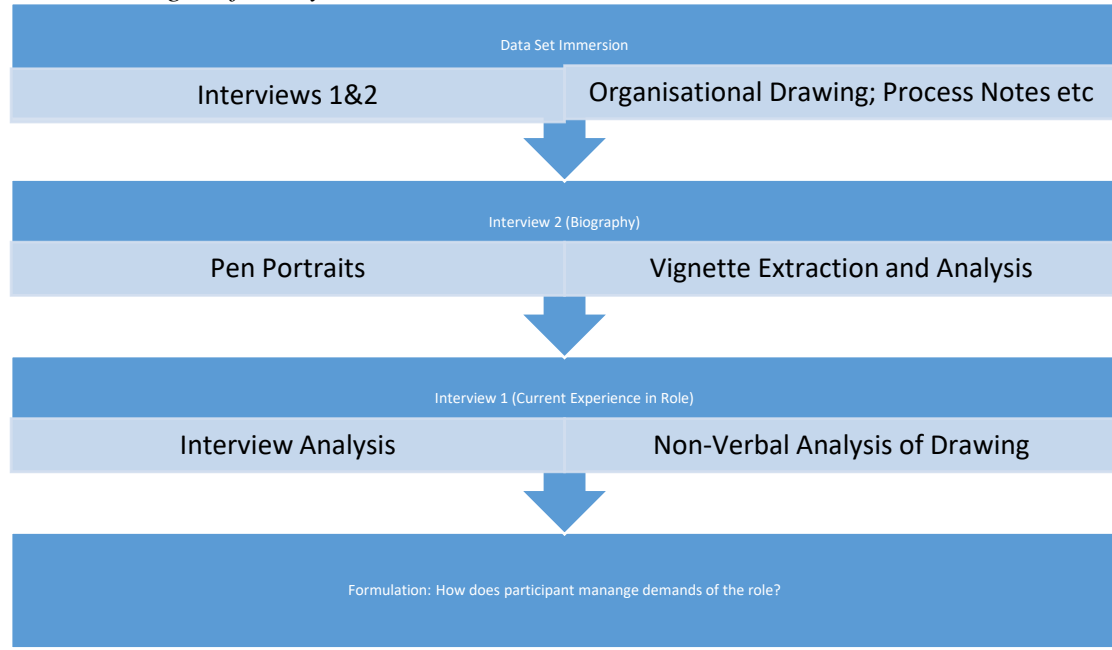
subject may arise because the original line of discussion had become too anxiety-raising and therefore the change acts as a defence against that anxiety. Looking below the surface, searching for possible unconscious links between statements (and supported by evidence from other parts of the data set, including theoretical evidence, reflexivity and other observations) permits the analysis of non-linear, emotional, associative unconscious thinking and logic. As a way of accessing and then utilising unconscious data a multi stage process was devised. This is discussed next.

Multi-stage analysis.

This study focused on three main data sources: an organisational drawing and two interviews. In addition process notes and a reflexive journal were also used. The organisational drawing was analysed, in conjunction with comments made about it. It offered a non-verbal "road to the unconscious" (Freud, 1920). Interview 1 was interested in the "here-and-now" concerns of how individuals take up and experience the headteacher role, specifically stressors and their responses to them. Interview 2 focused on the past: early childhood experiences, salient memories, key experiential factors that led them into their profession and current. The purpose was to extract meaningful narratives - vignettes – which would offer up material suitable for psychoanalytic study, the intent being to identify unconscious patterns and defences. Once these patterns had been worked into manageable thematic frames, they were used to interpret and explore the organisational drawing and the data from Interview One – the current experience of being a headteacher - with an aim to surface unconscious preoccupations and patterns. As this is a new approach it merits further elaboration, especially the procedure for elaborating vignettes and themes. Table 1 depicts the order of analysis.

Table 2: Stages of Analysis

Data Set Immersion	
Interviews 1&2	Organisational Drawing; Process Notes etc

Interview 2 (Biography)	
Pen Portraits	Vignette Extraction and Analysis

Interview 1 (Current Experience in Role)	
Interview Analysis	Non-Verbal Analysis of Drawing

Formulation: How does participant manange demands of the role?

These steps will be discussed in more detail now.

<u>Analysis of Interview Two: Biography</u>

Interview 2, while second, was analysed first. The first step was to listen repeatedly to the entire data set. In order to hold the participant more fully in mind, a pen portrait including all salient details was then written (see chapter 4).Once this was done, Interview 2 was scoured for complete narratives, stories about episodes from the participants' lives which were encouraged by use of the FANI and the use of questions that encouraged a detailed answer: "can you tell me about a time when…?"

When these vignettes were extracted, a technique derived from the Object Relations Technique (Phillipson, 1955; Shaw, 2002) was used. The ORT is a projective test, the purpose of which is to access and then delineate unconscious mental constructs through a rigorous analysis of the data. It consists of a set of twelve pictures presented to a participant with an instruction something like "I am going to show you a picture and I want you to tell me a story with a beginning, middle and an end". In this study,

vignettes were identified if they conformed to a discrete temporal event involving one or more individuals in an action; essentially, someone does something to someone/something with results (Shaw, 2002, p. 19). By "parsing" these vignettes it is possible to reduce them to the bare essentials, a single sentence, which reveal unconscious patterns of expectation and behaviour.

In this study all possible vignettes were first identified by scouring the data set and identifying discrete stories fulfilling the criteria above. Following Shaw (2002) each vignette was then reduced to a single sentence identifying a subject, action, object, consequence; essentially, "who does what to whom, with what result(s)?" The result itself is either carried out or blocked, signifying a level of perceived agency by the actor but also, following object relations theory, offering insights into the participant's own object relations. For example, benign objects being able to contain or malign objects being thwarted from engaging in hostile or persecutory actions. This process, likened to a press that effectively reduces a vignette to its essence, shapes the story into a thematic sentence, chronicling the essential facts. Once a basic theme is identified, the vignettes could be compared and key themes identified. Thus, the biographical interview serves two related purposes. First it gives relevant biographical information about participants and about their journey into teaching. Secondly, when each vignette is further analysed, it reveals, at an unconscious level, a template for how that participant perceives the world, an unconscious perceptual frame, which can then be used to analyse and make sense of his or her accounts of being a headteacher in Interview 1, which explores the current experience of being a headteacher.

To illustrate this, two examples are taken from Participant B. On the surface, they appear unrelated, but by reducing the story to bare essentials, an essential template is revealed. In the vignette "CD Players in the Shower", Peter returns home to discover he cannot use his shower because his money-orientated father has placed CD players in his shower (to sell later). Later on, in "The Boy in Care" Peter recounts a seemingly unrelated incident in which a student is put into care because his mother cannot care for him. The example Peter gives is that she spends her limited money on beer, not on meeting his basic needs. Different as they are, the working through of the process, "who does what to whom, with what results", reveals a similar underlying template, one of parental objects failing to meet a child's needs.

Table 3 is an example of the procedure:

Table 3: Example of Vignette Analysis

Vignette	Single Sentence	Who	Does what	Results-facilitated or blocked	By whom	Parsed sentence
CDs in the Shower	Peter cannot have a shower as one of his father's money making schemes – cd players – is stored in the shower	Peter	Seeks shower	Cd player block shower	From *father who prioritizes money*	Peter unable to get basic needs met from parents
The Boy in Care	A neglected boy who cares for siblings is taken into care against mothers wishes, while there is nothing Peter can do	Child	Seeks maternal comfort and cares for siblings	Put into care	By Social care Because *mother prioritizes alcohol*	Child unable to get basic needs met from parents.

Following the ORT, any story presented is held to signify the dynamic workings of the interviewee's unconscious. Thus, while at a conscious level Peter is talking about a

memorable incident in his career as a teacher, at an unconscious level his story reveals something of his object relations, including unconscious patterns, preoccupations and defences.

Once individual themes have been identified from each vignette they are analysed again to produce superordinate themes. These superordinate themes, such as "adults/parental objects unable to meet basic needs", are then used as a conceptual frame to interpret experiences and constructs from the organisational drawing and Interview1, with the ultimate aim being to offer a psychoanalytic account of how they respond to the stresses of the role of headteacher. The parallels with the ORT continue, as once an ORT is completed it offers a way to make deeper sense of an individual's behaviour and underlying motivation (Shaw, 2002).

Analysis of Organisational Drawing

The organisational drawing is intended to access non-verbal, latent information about the participants' role conception and relationship to the organisation as a whole. The drawings are interpreted projectively, following similar approaches to Human Figure Drawings (Machover, 1949; Koppitz, 1968) and kinetic family drawings (Burns and Kaufman, 1987). The use of drawings as a means to access non-verbal and or unconscious preoccupations is a recognised psychoanalytic tool. Organizational Drawings are a development of this and have been part of Educational Psychology and Organizational Consultancy courses at the Tavistock Clinic. The underlying premise is that the psyche projects itself, to a greater or lesser extent, into whatever it sees. Thus, a drawing of a human figure or an organisation will reveal more than just artistic ability (although great emphasis is laid on the pronouncement that such drawings are not seen

as works of art). Rather, they provide insight into how an individual perceives an entity, where they locate themselves (or do not) and what forms of static and dynamic relationships are deemed important.

Organisational Drawings are not viewed as objective or conclusive fact in themselves and some experience of drawing and considering them (usually in groups) is a helpful pre-requisite to using them clinically. A familiarity with psychoanalytic theory, including projection, is important, as well. Inclusions, omissions, specific placements are all held to have an, often unconscious, meaning.

In this study the drawings were considered after immersion the data set as a whole, that is, along with both interviews "held in mind". A participant's drawing was then laid out and observed with "evenly-hovering attention". This is a more passive approach to data analysis, allowing the sense of the participant, their experience, and their words to rise up and coalesce around the researcher's perception of the drawing. This leads to the development of a working hypothesis that is not rooted purely in a cognitive, rational mind-set but also considers the emotions evoked by the interview and drawing, thoughts and associations. Such hypotheses are then evaluated against the data set as a whole and either rejected or developed.

It is important to note that a conclusion drawn from the organisational drawing is never seen as a definitive fact in and of itself. What it does is to amplify, or give emotional form, to other types of data. For example, the analysis of Shelley's drawing below served to strengthen the theme that the world is dangerous and Shelley must create a safe region for her students and herself. Drawing herself as a gate-keeper and then

emphasising the word "safety" (even when instructed not to use words in the drawing) was an important piece of information that demonstrated just how important this need for safety was for her. Without the organisational drawing the importance of this may well have been overlooked or downplayed.

Here they were considered with the superordinate themes from the vignettes held tentatively in mind. The intention was to see what might be revealed by the drawing, while also considering relevant information from the vignette analysis. Verbal data, from questions about the drawings were then thematically analysed in the same manner as Interview 1, described next.

Interview 1: Current Experience of Role

As stated this study was a piece of psychosocial research utilising psychoanalysis as an overt epistemology. The data amassed certainly had a conscious, rational-cognitive component but this study was chiefly interested in the unconscious and was designed, using the FANI, to identify and follow the associative, emotional logic of the unconscious. As such, the methods of more traditional data analysis approaches were not viable: the reduction of utterances to specific themes and codes would have entailed a loss of the associative links made between statements *across* the data set.

Engaging in psychoanalytically informed research allows for the idea of unconscious processes and this research was predicated on a "dialogue of unconsciousness". Once recognised this can be – and was – used as a form of data analysis, following, loosely, Bion's injunction to approach each new session "without memory or desire". In this case the researcher, having thoroughly familiarised himself with the entire data set and

then producing the pen portrait to hold the participant in mind, read through the transcript again. This was done in an expressly calm, almost meditative, state with attention split between the text and his own associations, thoughts and feelings in response to it. These were then logged. Two forms of data, following the research question arose out of this process.

The first type loosely coded material relating to the experience of being a headteacher. This were developed into themes, following Braun and Clarke's view that a theme is that which "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). All headteachers spoke about the stress of the role, a superordinate theme but each participant went on to describe the form and nature of these stresses in very different ways and these were coded as subtypes of stress. It was this activity that gave information about the stresses headteachers experience.

The second class of information derived came from the associative approach described above and was concerned with the types of unconscious processes participants used to manage the stresses of the role. This allowed for links to be made that a more consciously orientated coding system might would have been unable to capture. An example will help to illustrate. Participant A's drawing depicted a happy place in which community, teamwork and happiness were all emphasised. He did not draw himself specifically or make any reference to the stresses of the job. It was a happy, hopeful drawing – and yet something was denied, omitted. Jim later affirmed that the job was extremely stressful. What then occured is interesting: having named the stresses that most weigh on him, he, seemingly unrelatedly – begans to name specific people in the

school who were important to him. Reviewing the interview and drawing in the method described led the researcher to the realisation that he had in fact named only people responsible for the stresses he had identified (PA for handling media, finance manager for finance and deputy head for parents). It was only by holding the entire data set in mind that such links could be sensed, followed and either confirmed or disconfirmed, using other sources of data (process notes, other parts of the set and so on) to triangulate and verify.

Having established that this was occurring, it became possible to test out a hypothesis, in this case: Jim manages the stress of the job by locating aspects of it in named people close to him. Scrutinising the data led to the confirmation of this hypothesis, further recognising that this was not a pathological process but one built on a view of his school as a benign organisation that had its foundations in earlier experiences of parents working hard behind the scenes (as he and his staff were "behind the scenes" of the drawing) to create a happy environment in which the shy ones were noticed and individual strengths were brought out without competition or conflict.

The approach of data analysis described here was complex and multi-staged, working from the material collected during the two interviews to delineate unconscious processes that shaped how individual participants perceived their world (the vignettes derived from Interview 2:Biography). These were then held in mind as the types of stresses each participant experienced in role were identified, as well as the unconscious mechanisms and processes they used to manage these stresses. While complex, it is argued that this approach reveals a type of information that could not otherwise be discerned.

The next section will consider issues of validity, paying additional attention to the types of validity psychosocial methods offer.

Validity Issues

Analysing the data of defended subjects presents a challenge to the prevailing norms of what is considered valid data, in that attention is paid as much to what is not said as to what is said. The psycho-social approach places emphasis on the interview as a whole, as opposed to coding fragments of it. The researcher, in analysing the interview "experience", is trying to make links between utterances that participants may not consciously recognise as having related meaning – part of a whole. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). The use of a psychosocial methodology introduces, therefore, new ways of establishing validity in addition to existing forms. Breakwell, (2012) states that one way of establishing validity of data is to complement it with other types of data such as "observation, diary techniques or experimental procedures" (p.383). Written and recorded process notes were made before and after interviews for this purpose.

Yardley (2008) advocates the following criteria for ensuring validity in qualitative research:

1. Commitment and rigour: the attention to the quality of participant selection and depth of study, rather than breadth, is an important criterion for validity. Valid research requires rigour in the level of commitment and integrity one brings to analysing the data.

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2. Audit trail: researchers keep a paper, or audit trail that would allow any auditor to retrace all the stages of the analysis. Documentation and recordings will be stored for three years secure storage facility.

3. Coherence and Transparency: Coherence describes the need for research to "make sense as a consistent whole" (ibid, p.248). This requires a good fit between the research question, the theoretical approach, the methodology and the data analysis. Transparency refers to the need for the study and the steps that compose it to be clear to the reader, explaining what was done, how and why.

Psychosocial research has the added dimension of the use of transference and counter-transference experiences as emotional data, which can be noted down in a diary or process note. Hollway and Jefferson identify "emotional responses as a resource to produce valid knowledge" (2013, p.166). Indeed, a psychoanalytic epistemology and methodology are recognised as powerful because they see transference and countertransference responses "as a resource for understanding that could not be achieved through a cognitive analytic kind of knowing" (ibid. p.166).

Given the nebulous nature of the unconscious and the accompanying risk of engaging in "wild analysis" (Freud, 1910), Hollway and Jefferson (2013) recommend utilising existing psychoanalytic theory when working with defended subjects. They refer to the key precepts of psychoanalytic thought including introjection, splitting, projection and projective identification, transference and counter-transference. They describe a process in which the data is thoroughly interrogated and "patterns of defences", (drawing from object relations theory) are identified once other, more rational

interpretations have been exhausted. This requires a rigorous analysis of the interview data and predicates a thoroughly prepared and well-conducted interview.

An additional approach to ensuring validity is reflexivity. Reflexivity is a recognised requirement in qualitative research (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013), where the researcher strives to ensure research validity through reflection and the awareness that as a researcher he or she is not a passive observer but part of a research process in which both parties are mutually influenced and influencing. Holloway and Jefferson identify the concept of a defended researcher (ibid. p.165) using a psychosocial methodology and moving beyond "the old scientistic notion of the objective to ask the question of what in the researcher's own biography motivates them to enquire into the topics they choose and guide their orientation" (ibid. p.165.). This is explored further in the reflexive note (Appendix 3).

A final means of seeking validity will be through the use of a reflective discussions about data analysis. Discussions were had with a trainee psychoanalyst, psychoanalytically informed EPs and Clinical Psychologists, and feedback to participants themselves.

<u>Ethical considerations</u>

This research adhered to the British Psychological Society's code of human research (2010). The code identifies four key principles that should inform research with human participants:

1. Respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons. Participants were told verbally and in writing that they were free to withdraw from the research procedure at

any point without need of explanation. The matter of confidentiality and anonymity was also explained. All interviews were conducted in a spirit of compassion and respect for the dignity of the individual.

2. Scientific value. This refers to the need for the research study to be well designed and suited to purpose, resulting in useful and meaningful findings.

3. Social responsibility. The findings of the research study should have some beneficial contribution, not just to the psychological community, but to the "common good" (Code of Human Ethics, p.11).

4. Maximising benefit and minimising harm. The research experience was considered "from the standpoint of the research participant" (ibid, p.11). It is suggested that the experience of reflecting on role and experiences shaping their role could have a beneficial impact on individual participants. It was also recognised that, as defended subjects, the act of discussing aspects of their lives could be distressing. Consequently, measures were taken to ensure that the researcher was able to manage and support individuals and their distress and if he could not do so, to signpost the individual to appropriate sources of support.

Prior to the commencement of interviews a research protocol was submitted (appendix 6) and an application for ethical review was also submitted to the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (appendix 5).

In initial written communication with participants, an information sheet and declaration of informed consent (appendix 1) was sent. At each first meeting the researcher confirmed that they had read the information sheet and the declaration of informed consent was signed by both parties.

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Psychosocial methodologies add a new ethical dimension as they assume the existence of an unconscious. This by definition means there are aspects of an individual's psyche about which they have no knowledge and over which they have little control. This creates an ethical dilemma for a psychosocial researcher, especially when it is the unconscious that is being studied. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) discuss two additional principals that are important when undertaking psychosocial research:

1. Awareness of power relationships. One criticism of a psychosocial research in that psychoanalysis is "an undemocratic dialogue" (Hollway and Jefferson 2013, p.156). While headteachers are not a low status or powerless group, care was given to ensure they had autonomy and control in the interview process. A written statement of informed consent was sent to the interviewees. In the meetings themselves the intent to explore aspects of biography was restated, and that they were free to exit the process at any time.

2. Compassion. The use of transference and counter-transference experiences could lead to a shift in power dynamics in the relationship and, in some cases of judgement. Compassion was called upon in this research study and it was recognised that there were two defended subjects in each interview, both with flaws, vulnerabilities and an unconscious about which they knew little. This did lead to some very powerful and genuine encounters.

Data storage

Participants' recordings were stored in a password protected file on a secure server and each Participant was designated A, B and C. In this study names have been changed. Names and contact details were stored in a separate unrelated file. Organisational

drawings and declarations of informed consent were stored in a locked file in the researcher's office.

The recordings were sent to a professional transcriber using a secure upload system. Once transcribed, all names were changed and documents saved accordingly. Interview transcripts were stored on a password encrypted computer.

At the end of the research, files will be stored on a password protected folder in a secure server dedicated student research at the Tavistock and Portman NHS foundation trust. It will be kept for three years after the end of the study, following guidelines from University of Essex.

Analysis

This section analyses data from three secondary headteachers, two men and a woman. They are heads of "Good" or "Outstanding" schools, as rated by OFSTED. The purpose of this research is to explore how unconscious factors, rooted in their formative years, influence the conception of the role of head teacher. Given that these heads are successful, this is not an attempt to reveal pathology. Rather, it explores the way in which the working through of unconscious preoccupations, through role, enables heads to manage the demands of running a large secondary school. As will be seen, all three admit to high levels of stress at times and yet they are able to remain emotionally and psychologically engaged with the job. This implies some needs are being met, freeing up libidinal resources to confront varied challenges each day. Stokes, in considering the psychosocial development of lawyers, observes that,

occupations provide opportunities for the discharge and gratification of drives, from which derives the motivation, as well as opportunities, for reducing internal conflict over the expression of these drives in a socially sanctioned manner".

(Stokes, 2015, p.227)

The question that can be considered, then, is "what internal, unconscious processes are worked out using the conceptualised role – and associated power – of headteachers by the individuals taking up that role?"

By exploring headteacher accounts of their past and analysing them for unconscious patterns, object relations and defensive postures, can a new understanding of how heads manage role stress and related anxiety be discerned? Is there something in the successful conception of role that itself contains headteachers, permitting them to take up a containing function for the organisation as a whole?

The study involves a multi-staged process, the first of which is the analysis of vignettes extracted from Interview 2, participant biography. Vignettes are derived from the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) and analysed using psychoanalytic theory, drawing out a theme from each vignette. As common themes are observed, superordinate categories are worked up. Once the main themes are developed (usually two or three), these are deployed to analyse participants' organisational drawings and comments about their current role, their relationship (in their mind) to their school and how the pressures, of the role are managed. Finally, after analysis of both interviews and the organisational drawing, a formulation is proposed, exploring how unconscious process, through role conception, help headteachers manage the stresses of their roles. The format is as follows:

1. Vignette analysis[1]

2. Organisational drawing analysis

3. The experience of being a head teacher

4. How are these pressures and demands managed?

The approached used in this research, following Hollway and Johnson (2013), favours consideration of each data set as a gestalt. To help with this, Hollway and Johnson (2013) propose that a pen portrait is written for each participant, summarising key biographical information and presenting it in a manageable enough size for the person – as a whole person – to be psychologically held in mind during data analysis; to make "the person come alive for the reader" (ibid, p.65). This allows links to be made across separate points in the data set. The pen portraits precede each analysis, below. The

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[1] Each vignette is given the name is acquired during the vignette analysis and can be found in the appropriate appendix for each participant.

participants are Jim, Peter and Shelley. They will be considered in turn. Hollway and Jefferson suggest the use of a pen portrait to hold the participant in mind during data analysis. To help the reader have a clearer sense of the individual these are included at the beginning of each analysis.

Participant A: Jim

"Oh yeah, it's quite frightening in that sense. If you think about it for too long you'd never do it!"

Jim is a 54 year old man, married with two children in their late teens. This is his first headship, and the school, a maintained secondary school in a small town, has seen its rating rise to "Good" during his time.

Jim's pen portrait

Jim is a fifty-four year old man. He is married with two children, aged seventeen and twenty. Jim is the youngest of three children, with an older sister and brother. His father was a professor of physics. His mother was bright but stayed at home as that is "what you did in the 50s and 60s, so I am afraid there was that element in the household". He speaks warmly of parents with no criticism or resentment. He and his siblings respect each other and all nephews and nieces get on, even now. Politics was a big thing at home. His mother's side were Fabians and father's side had dealings with Oswold Mosley in past. His father was won over by his mother's politics.

A shy child, Jim enjoyed primary school. One day he wants to go back and say, "do you know what, I am your ex-pupil, I'm a headteacher now. Can I come back and do

an assembly?" Lovely, lovely time there. Then, in days of 11 plus got into a grammar school. "I didn't like it at all, didn't like it at all. I think my parents ..." But it was the right thing for his parents to send him: "I get that. Lots of in-crowds and they got chosen for all the things. Highly competitive." Jim held his own but it was a highflying school and he was not one of the confident ones who shone.

He was not really noticed all the way through school, until an incident when he was in sixth form. The mother of his friend, a working-class woman, who he felt many of the teachers look down on, pressed for her son and Jim's band to be allowed to play the school dance. Jim MCed. This was a pivotal moment for him: he felt noticed and subsequently the head offered him a part in the play. This has been an abiding memory and the experience of noticing the quiet ones and giving them roles is really important to him. This was the first time he experienced the in-crowd not just getting it. "I learnt a lot from that… I showed the world that actually, hello, I can do this. And the power of being noticed".

Jim's parents were ambitious but not over-ambitious and all three children went off to university. Jim did history at Durham, loving it, and stayed on another year to do a PGCE there. As he took on more roles within university life he became more confident. A defining memory from this period was when, during a lesson observation the Head of School Education dropped in and observed and said, "Okay so you're going to be a headteacher then". Jim remember that many years later: "God, he spotted that years ago".

Jim started teaching in Gateshead. He had a very good head of Department who "believed in me" and gave him lots of ideas. Subsequently he came down South to take up an assistant headteacher role. This was to be a form of rebirth, and an awaking of

values he had that he had never fully articulated before. As an assistant head with pastoral duties he was allowed to develop his own vision. At this school, if you had a bit of spark, they "bring you on and develop you animated him start to think about headteacher-ship.

Jim met his future wife there and was introduced to a very different family: "She'd made her way up with massive loving support" but was the only one in her generation to have gone to university. He has massive admiration for her. He then became a father. He found parenting much harder than he thought it would be. But it has given him perspective and he can now see twenty something teachers not getting it, not seeing how hard it is for parents. He feels fortunate that he had his kids just before Facebook in the digital age, is that adds a new level of pressure: "those poor parents. How do they do it"? Jim feels that he helped his son too much with GCSEs and he had a shock at AS, failing first time round. It was really hard to see him suffer but Jim realised he couldn't do it for him. At 6th form, he was helped because there were teachers that "believed in him". Again this has really influenced how Jim thinks about his own headship.

Back at ----, where he was assistant head the headteacher kept you on your toes, would ask teachers in and invite them to think about things in new ways, something which Jim liked. He really had values confronted at ---- by the head and it shaped him. He described being pinned to the wall by questions. It was around this time he realised his sister had been treated differently to him. He started to think that the art of teaching is "reaching out to the quiet one who you know have ability and getting them to express themselves".

Jim was then promoted to deputy within the same school under a new headteacher and realised that there was much more to the role than pastoral care. The new headteacher a woman, was a very inspirational person and opened his eyes to the possibility of headship, although he was not yet ready to become head. When he did decide, it was after a lot of thinking and when his children were older. Importantly he did not think his life would be a failure if he did not become a headteacher and he was very selective about finding the right school. In the end he did and was appointed. People have said that what they like about him as leader is "they don't think I think I am better than them… and I genuinely don't because I've not grown up in a system where I was chosen for this and that: I had to fight to get noticed."

Being a head has highlighted strengths and resiliency is that he did not know he had – "inner grit and vision". Even when his mother was dying in the first term of his headship, with OFSTED looming, he was able to keep going. He recognises he is a worrier but is able to get perspective. Jim knows he will not be a head for ever and other parts of his life continue to be important

<u>Vignette analysis</u>

Jim's interview produced eight vignettes. Two concerned his parents, one another adult while at school. One was from his PGCE, with one more from his first school and two form his pervious school, where he was assistant and deputy head. Another concerned his son's struggles with his AS level exams. Analysis reveals two key, interrelated themes: the effect of a benign environment on facilitating growth and the importance of an observant adult mind to notice "the quiet ones".

<u>Theme 1: A benign environment facilitates growth.</u>

A clear theme identified in three vignettes is that a benign, thoughtful environment allows quiet, shy people (such as Jim) to flourish. The Vignette "Christmas" gives a powerful example of this:

It was incredibly special, not because it was Christmas, so much, but because real preparations went into it. We all played games that were created that were just right to involve us. Not the quiz that identifies who's the cleverest and who's got the best general knowledge, not at all. It was all beautifully thought through, these wonderful, almost like the old fashioned, parlour games that never put anybody above anybody else. So good. (A, 30:7-11)[2]

In Jim's account, there is a benign adult thoughtfulness suffusing the environment and ensuring a level of harmony. While there is a defensive quality to this, an avoidance of competition and conflict, Jim is aware that "it wasn't all perfect". However, in his memory – and as a model – it permitted his siblings to grow and develop relatively harmoniously. This was not by chance: "…looking back it was such a happy time. I know now that actually my mum and dad sorted that out, they worked that out." (A, 30:13-14). This has been very influential and Jim can be "quite obsessed about planning", something he got from them and for which he is grateful as "you don't just get happiness, you have to work for it". (A, 30:19-20)

This theme is returned to in his second vignette, Parent's Evening. Jim recounts how his teacher expressed surprise that Jim was not good at physics, as his father was a physics professor. His father was "polite" but "livid". He followed the matter up later saying to the teacher,

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[2] Quotes are presented as follows Participant (A, B, C), Page: Line Numbers.

You don't ever say that in front of my son. Everybody has different strengths and actually compared to the majority of the country he's very good at physics. He might not be one of your high fliers, but so what? (A, 28:7-9).

The strength of feeling as he spoke highlighted just how important this story was to Jim and emphasises the importance for him of strong, caring adults managing an environment in a way that allows for an individual's abilities to flourish.

Many of his stories feature a kind, thoughtful adult, usually a teacher or a parent, who does not deny challenges but ensures that they can be met successfully if an individual is willing to face them and expend effort. This is most clear in the vignette, "Hugh's Exam". In this, account Hugh has failed his AS levels having done well in GCSEs. In 6th form he did not really apply himself and he failed his first year. And while some teachers "didn't believe in him", several did. They noticed a "spark" and while no-one could do the work for him, he picked himself up in the resits.

This is a moving account of the power of teachers in his son's life. At a deeper level it demonstrates Jim's world as being peopled with sympathetic, containing objects, who manage the environment so he can flourish. However, going further, this and other accounts begin to indicate the outline of a template for managing stress and anxiety and to offer the unconscious foundations of how Jim would conceive of and take up the role of head teacher, something discussed later. In terms of the importance of facilitating a benign, facilitative environment, Jim himself makes a link between these experiences and his role as head teacher:

So when you get together how do you enable that to flourish and everybody to get on with each other and just completely respect each other and enjoy themselves without any edge (A, 30:23-25) ...So I want that in the school as well. (A, 30:32)

Theme 2: A "noticing" mind

The second theme is that of an interested, thoughtful mind noticing and drawing out qualities and skills in someone who is quiet or shy. In "PGCE", Jim does a PGCE, in which latent skills are observed by the university's Head of the School of Education:

And I remember he saw my lesson and at the end, he said, "Okay, so you're going to be a head teacher then". I said, "Sorry?" Very odd. And he said that, and it made me laugh really, I said, "Am I? ((Laughs)) I'm not sure I can be a Teacher yet never mind a head teacher". "Oh yes, I can see. It's my job to identify possible leaders in the future in the School of Education". (A, 25:12 – 15)

This had a powerful effect on Jim:

But I remembered it years later when I got this job and I thought, 'God, he spotted that years ago'. But it was nice that he said that because it was someone who put faith in me, not about being head teacher but I think someone who was clearly saying to me "I think you're quite good at this", and so that helped me as well confidence wise. (A, 25:15-19)

Someone saw a quality in Jim that he had not seen and being noticed it developed, quite powerfully in this case, leading to his becoming head teacher.

During his first school, a similar situation arises. It was a "tough baptism of fire" and Jim thought at times "I can't do this longer than a year. Let's change professions; this is hard" (A, 25. l. 21-22). But he "had a very good Head of Department who certainly believed in me and gave me lots of great advice and ideas" (A, 25:23-24). At this point it clicked and he suddenly developed better relationships with the students.

The theme is there again in his next school, where he served as a deputy head. There, "if you've got a bit of spark, they'll bring you on and develop you" (A, 25:30-31), which they did. Jim took up a pastoral lead and flourished in a role that allowed him to "look after these five hundred people, hopefully really well but without the finances and headaches of full headship." (A, 26:7-9).

The idea of an adult mind observing and noticing latent skills in quiet and shy students is emphasised fully in the "Band" vignette. After a friend's mum pushes to have her son's band play at the school dance, even though they were not the "in-crowd", (this is another example of the behind the scenes effort to create a benevolent environment) Jim has a chance to MC the evening, something he does well. Later, in his penultimate term, he is offered a part in the school play by the head teacher, something Jim had mixed feelings about:

I knew it was related to Saturday [his MCing], he'd actually seen me, and I remember thinking, 'Why couldn't you have noticed this before? I've always had that in me and your school never once noticed that. Never once'. (A, 37:34 - 38. l. 1).

 The experience gave him a sense of confidence in himself as a person and as a performer, a role he immediately linked to being a head teacher and having to put on a certain mien, regardless of how one was feeling. This vignette highlights "the power of actually being noticed" (A, 38:13), a quality of attention which he feels is essential in order to involve the quiet "non-prefects" in a school community. Students just like Jim.

<u>Jim's Organisational Drawing</u>

Jim's drawing (appendix 7ai) revolved, in his words, around "community and teamwork". Happiness was a central focus: "Happiness, very important… for, adults, children, for everybody, and thinkers, real thinkers" (A, 1:11-13). In his view, happy learners were what lead to targets being met. The centre of his drawing has two people facing each other and it is that "joy of when people think together" (A, 1:13) that is what education is really about. It also highlights a tendency towards pairing, a method, discussed later, for sharing out task-related concerns with specific members of staff.

Jim omitted to draw any of the pressures associated with the role, although he recognised their existence, the significance of which is considered below. Financial pressures, OFSTED inspections, League tables, and a range of other phenomena associated with headteacher stress did not feature in his drawing. Jim was aware of this but felt that they could be managed by answering this question:

What does good learning look like? Do we love learning? All of us, whatever age we are, whatever our role is in the school, all of that to me is absolutely crucial and actually the exams and the Ofsted then will come with it. (A, 2:1-3)

A more striking absence in the drawing is Jim himself, despite the specific instruction to "draw your organisation and your role in it". Jim responded that he was a real team player and "so I sit within this picture rather than above it" (A, 2:13-14). He was, however, cognisant of his role as leader and of the importance of having a vision that people would follow:

I know that the way I conduct myself, the way I'm thinking, the way I'm communicating, my ethos, and all the rest of is, is absolutely essential to all this working. (A, 2:15-18)

In the next section Jim's current experience of being a head teacher is considered.

The experience of being a headteacher.

Jim clearly enjoys his job and gets a great deal of satisfaction from it. He was careful not to rush into the first headship post but waited for a school that was a "good fit" for his values and ethos. At the same time, the job is considerably demanding and stressful. Jim describes a situation in which the demands of the role are all encompassing. Waking up,

just about every day, I'm straight on to school issues, immediately as well. "What am I going to do about that one?" and that's where you can tell, and it's like you're just completely, as soon as those eyes open or as soon as you wake up, you just completely rev up, "Right, I've got to do this, I've got to do that, got to do that. Heck, I've got to do all that by whatever," and that's a sign of stress and that's hard, managing that is hard. (A, 26:28-33)

There are a number of existential threats that cause stress and considerable anxiety. The worries about exam results are unsurprisingly present. Worries about OFSTED can be significant, especially as Jim's schools was OFSTED rating 3 and he had to get it to a 2 (Good). But, from Jim's account, these seemed manageable; this in fact was the job he had taken on. In his responses, however, there emerged three sources of threat and stress which were harder to manage.

The first was the media and the experience of being out of control. Jim was quick to identify local media as one of the hardest stresses, mentioning a colleague who had recently resigned because of the local newspaper. Jim has managed this by cultivating relations with the press but there is always the thought, when something bad happens,

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"Oh no, is that going to be on your front page next week?" (A, 17:26-27). Actually, for Jim, something bad has only happened once but the sense of loss of control over an issue affecting the school was huge.

A second major anxiety was the threat to his own self-esteem should things go badly at the school: "you are completely and utterly exposed to this big community and, whether you like it or not, the success of the school will be pinned on you massively" (A, 21:1-2). This threat of exposure and reputational damage is located specifically in the fear of staying at OFSTED 3 ("well, that head's no good then") and in poor exam results ("August is not much fun as a head and you're waiting for those results" - A, 21:6-7).

His final noticeable concern is financial security and its impact on him and the family: "You can lose your job so easily, which you couldn't as a deputy, so easily, frankly, and certainly not as a teacher below that level" (A, 21:12-13). He had to prepare for the fact that a poor performance would lead to him losing his job and explore the impact on his family. Jim was methodical, seeking out a school where he felt he could succeed and also waiting until his children were older. Nevertheless, the "fear bit" is still there and he recognises that

it is a bit like football coaches and it is real. And if you ask any head teacher, they'll tell you that's one of their biggest fears, "Will I be able to pay my mortgage?" You earn more than other people but you've got the least security. (A, 21:29-31)

In this section the chief pressures and anxieties of Jim's role were discussed. The next section considers how, at an unconscious level, Jim manages these pressures. Links are made to the themes identified in his vignettes and it is proposed that he makes use of several unconscious strategies to permit him to remain engaged and face the demands presented to him.

How does Jim manage the demands of the role?

Jim used a number of approaches for managing the stresses, pressures and related anxieties of being a head teacher. Using a psychoanalytic lens to analyse the data, two key themes emerge.

Conception of organisation as benign

Jim's reconnaissance before accepting the job laid the foundations of his organisational concept: it was a good place with a good fit for his values. There were, however, big challenges and the change of leader is rarely smooth, whatever the fit. On top of this, Jim's mother had been ill, requiring daily visits of over three hours driving, before finally dying a few weeks after his start. At school there were HMI visits, strike days and the sudden announcement by Michael Gove, then Education Secretary, that only first exam entries would count in the important league tables. By any reckoning, this would amount to a highly stressful time, which understandably a person would struggle to manage. Jim, however, found it helpful in terms of settling and advancing his change agenda. He conceived of the people at school, the organisation, as being "so nice" with "this huge feeling of sympathy for me". But it goes further in Jim's thinking:

I am working with people who actually really care, genuinely care, and not just because I'm their boss and they want a pay rise! Actually I could tell there was a genuine warmth and that actually meant a lot to me, yeah. So that probably helped me to fit in even quicker. (A, 13:16-19)

In his mind Jim conceived the school as being caring at a time when he would have needed a good deal of comfort. It contained him in his grief (and other stresses). But

it did more than that. It allowed him to remain in role and to continue to focus on the task in a supportive manner: This feeling of 'this poor guy, he's become head of this school, we're an Ofsted 3, he's got HMI breathing down his neck and his mum dying!'"(A, 11:8-9). To develop this further, it is argued that his organisational object – the organisation in mind (Armstrong, 2005) - is a benign and facilitating object, very much like his parents and others described in the vignettes, which provided psychological containment for Jim-in-role, enabling him to engage meaningfully with the multiple tasks facing him.

Having been accepted, Jim is quick to begin creating optimal conditions for learning, by focusing on the needs of people and not just on exam results, although he holds these in mind as well. And here one discovers links between how he conceives of his role as headteacher and the structuring of his unconscious associations about the role as demonstrated through the elicited biographical vignettes. Jim is not a high charisma, lead-from-the-front type of leader, although, again, he recognises times when this is necessary and important. Rather, he states that "I sit within this [organisation] rather than actually above it" (A, 2:13-14). In other words, his view of his role is that it is not about him but about facilitating system-wide change across the school, dissolving himself into the fabric or the minds of those who follow him. A powerful example of this is in the case of a Year 11 student close to exclusion. Jim engineered a solution that led to him being educated off-site, eventually getting seven GCSEs. His account of feeding this news back at a staff meeting illustrates the "behind-the-scenes" conception of his role:

In fact, I got the deputy to talk about him, which I thought was even better, because I didn't want it to appear like, "Oh, Jim had the answer." (A, 21:24-26).

There are strong parallels between this and the Christmas vignette, with benign, thoughtful parents operating in the background, to ensure harmony and achievement. It is argued that this is an unconscious model of how to facilitate harmony and success from which Jim operates. Jim uses this and the authority of the role to find the "spark" in the mediocre, "quiet ones", as a counterpoint to the experiences recounted in the Band vignette, where only the prefects get noticed. It can be said, therefore, that Jim, modelling his role on a parental object that works behind the scenes, interested in "noticing" hidden gifts in the quiet ones, is symbolically repairing through his actions some of the psychological injury he experienced as a student himself. Furthermore, this is such a psychologically significant act for him, even if unconscious, that it counter-balances the more overt stresses and demands of the job. The unconscious pay-off of Jim as headteacher noticing Jim as one of the "quiet ones" gives him strength.

Relationships contain the container

Psychoanalytic theory and the FANI follow the thread of associative links through free associations. This includes links and parallel descriptions between events but also allows for meaning to be made from omissions – from what is not attended to. In his drawing Jim omitted the "restrictions" of finance, exams, the media, all things that he later admitted were significant stressors. Tellingly, however, the key individuals he mentions are those linked with just these stressors, his PA, the Business Manager and the Deputy Head. A psychoanalytic interpretation of this omission-anxiety link is that Jim is splitting and projecting out key organisational anxieties into role holders who are psychologically significant, people with whom he has sentience (Miller and Rice, 1967) and with whom he has early and trusting relations (he met the PA and Business Manager

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before school started and established a bond). His Deputy was supportive of him from the start.

Jim's accounts of each of these people is telling. His PA, for example takes up a powerful role and function in relation to the press when a negative article is published (a major stressor).

And my PA is so kind, she was actually up at 5.30 and in the newsagent, as it was opening, almost cutting and opening the newspaper at five o'clock because she was so desperate to see [negative article] and texting me straightaway!(A, 17:33-35)

When talking about finances, the area involving the business manager, he states, "the finances are massive and they're not getting any easier!" (A, 4:14) before going on to talk about his sense of responsibility for the employment of school staff. He then identifies in them one of his own key preoccupations, financial security, locating it in his worry for them:

I want them to do their job as well as they possibly can, but I want them to be secure in their jobs, but we live in a world where there are cuts all the time, big cuts to 6th form funding over the last couple of years, all those sorts of things you're grappling with. And I do feel this massive responsibility, a moral responsibility, to retain people in their jobs, therefore I have to make sure the finances are absolutely best value every minute of every day, so that person is key as well. (A, 4:16-21)

This is a good example of the type of associative link that the FANI can make. Superficially, these two statements might appear unrelated, with the thread connecting Jim's concerns about his own finances earlier, the naming of the business manager and then the financial pressures of running a school being missed.

The role of head, as Jim identifies, can be "quite a lonely job" (A, 4:4), with few people one can open up to. Jim was fortunate that he was able to develop a trusting relationship with his Deputy Head quickly. With him, Jim was able to think through complex issues in confidence, without them being broadcast "out there" before they are thought through. For someone who described a major anxiety as being "exposed" to the community "out there", such a thoughtful, confidant is a welcome necessity. Furthermore, it is his deputy who stays with him during his initial parental surgeries, his first exposure to the community: he offers him containment.

It is argued here that Jim has unconsciously identified key individuals into whom he can project specific unconscious anxieties. Following the pattern identified in his own vignettes, he identifies qualities in others that can help him to take up a leadership function that permits him to do this for students, creating a benign, caring environment and encouraging others to notice the quite, the shy, the average students and bring them on. This is not pathological. Here it is a legitimate, if unconscious, form of containment, allowing him to remain in touch with these demands without being emotionally overwhelmed by them. By finding containers he is able to contain the organisation-as-a whole.

These select role-holders contained some of the emotional content of legitimate organisational anxieties in such a way that permitted Jim to remain thoughtfully in touch with the reality of these issues. As he noted, "Oh yeah, it's quite frightening in that sense. If you think about it for too long you'd never do it!" (A, 21:31-33). By representing and holding certain anxieties resonant with their roles, these individuals and their relationship with Jim contained him in role to the extent that he could consider the school as a whole. There is nothing to suggest that he was in denial of the realities

of exam failure, hostile media or financial struggles. On the contrary he was very aware and resisted a pressure to go to the bottom line of exam results alone. He is opposed to this and seeks to establish an environment in which love of learning can flourish, bringing to the fore the two preoccupations identified in the vignette analysis: adults create environments in which children can flourish and also notice latent strengths. To do this some of the emotional frisson of the related issues is projected into key people for them to hold. By containing some of his worries for him, these relationships permit him to take up a containing function for the school-as-a-whole.

By conceiving of the school, through the lens of earlier experiences, as a benign, caring environment, Jim was able to authorise himself to be authentically human in role, in touch with vulnerability, while also contending with a hugely anxiety raising task. His conception of the organisation and his role, mediated through earlier informative experiences, provided him with a way of withstanding and managing the pressures associated with the role of headteacher.

Jim was the first of three case studies. The next case to be analysed is Peter

Participant B: Peter

"Those two days, I took the hit; I took every single hit and I was the one getting battered"

The focus of this study is to explore how the take-up of the headteacher roles is shaped by unconscious processes from an individual's own history, although this does not exclude more conscious and overt influences such as training and reflection. It demonstrates that through a specific form of listening, as described by this research,

certain patterns can be identified and explored. Because of the levels of power and authority a headteacher has over his or her school, these unconscious templates have ramifications for those working within the systems: staff and students. In a sense they operate, to a greater or lesser extent, as the echo of the headteacher's mind (Eloquin, 2016b). As will be highlighted in the Discussion, this indicates the relevance of this work for EP: by working with headteachers, exploring their background and current preoccupations, EPs can provide, through opportunities for increased self-awareness, the possibility of system-wide shifts.

In this case, the data reveals a complex system in which Peter, head of a Church of England Secondary school, elaborates a conception of his role that contains and reworks parts of his own adolescent disappointment and upheaval in a way that is both functional, supportive of staff and students, and ultimately reparative of his own "psychological injuries" (Hirschhorn, 1997, p.19). As before, the procedure is to describe themes derived from vignette analysis – indicative of unconscious preoccupations – and use them to explore how he relates, through role, to his school and makes sense of the demands of the role.

Peter's pen portrait

Peter is a fifty-three year old man. He is married with two children. Peter's maternal grand-parents were Stepney East End Irish Catholics, or at least maternal grandmother was: his grand-father converted to marry her but was not religious before. His grand-mother had immense faith, "second only to the pope". She was a strong woman, tough as nails. His grand-father is his role model and the antithesis of his father. His grandfather was a quiet man who just go on with things.

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Peter's father also converted to Catholicism to marry his mother. His parents were very different. His mother was tough, a hard woman but "a constant, always there and never letting anyone down, with no weakness". She was a constant because she needed to be and was programmed to be that. His father was from North London, a butcher by trade, following his own father. But he had wanted to be a draughtsman. He was cocky and unreliable and always focused on money, while his mother was religious.

The family moved from London to Luton to Orpington to Bedford/Hertfordshire border. Peter attended a catholic boy's school, which was pretty tough and wild. He was very bright and was in the "boffin gang". He found school easy and tended to blag it, a habit he still relies on. He cruised into 6th form but a shock U grade in a physics mock woke him up a bit. His tutor encouraged him to use the 6 months remaining to work and he got a B in the end. But it was a shock. Peter feels that he has lived with "underachievement" and there is a sense of regret about missed opportunities. Teaching is a way of passing on "my learned wisdom… because it's too late for me to do those things".

At around eighteen, his parents' marriage started to go wrong, with them divorcing two years later. His father insisted Peter provide for the family, although he himself was not contributing much, eventually filing for bankruptcy. Peter, his mum and younger twin sisters moved in with her parents. Even then, his maternal grand-mother was accepting and welcoming of dad – he "is like a son to me". Peter rebelled against his father's view of things, basically the primacy of money, and focused on what he was interested in: computers. But now, when he looks in the mirror, he sees his dad. Peter also tries to be emotionally intelligent, rather than just getting on with it as his mother had done.

Peter went to university to study computer science, a really hot topic at the time. In retrospect, if he had had any motivation and drive he might have aimed for Cambridge but he admits, even now, he is lazy and needs external motivation. Peter often refers to the importance of moral purpose, however, and this does seem something that helps to guide him. At university he was on a sandwich course where he spent a year in a computer firm. He got a job there after graduating and the next month discovered the whole company was relocating to Sweden. Friends suggested teaching but he was initially resistant. However, by chance, when he rang Bath University PGCE course, the only tutor who was in – it was the holidays – was the maths tutor and she told him to come for interview and he was accepted.

Despite initial reservations about teaching, the first time he was in the classroom he felt it was right for him. Peter says that if he was to write a book it would be called "My stumble to headship", but, somewhat paradoxically, knew from the start that if he was going to teach he was going to be a head. He dressed from the first day in a suit. His second placement was Well's Cathedral school, which challenged preconceptions about independent schools. He is still against them but his stance softened. He immersed himself fully there – and saw it as a community, a theme that is important to him.

Peter was a maths teacher at his first school for five years. He looked around finding the right school for him and enjoyed his time there. Years later he went back to talk to the headteacher, who was retiring, and was interested to see that behind the facade of certainty there was a lot of questioning and acceptance that, as a leader, he had made mistakes, had got things wrong.

Peter then left education and worked for an IT company for four years, rising to being general manager, where he had a good amount of autonomy. Despite enjoying the job, leaving his teacher friends in school felt like a betrayal. Then after four years, with the economy and jobs looking a bit shaky – he had a family now – he applied for an assistant head teacher role. He rang up to check, saying he was a "wild card" but the headteacher told him to come and he got the job. He did six years there. Then, the local authority asked him to be seconded to a failing school to raise standards in maths. After his secondment he told the headteacher at this school that the school needed another deputy head. He got that job and was there for 18 months. Then one day his wife rang up and told him of this job in C-----, "deadline tomorrow". He applied for the job that night and, again, got it. As a family they moved to C----- and he has been head at his current school for three and a half years.

Peter recognises he has itchy feet and gets bored easily. This is what he likes about headship, as it is never dull and allows him to spend time with kids. His children go to the school and this is the first time he can really influence a place. He admits he doesn't do much but that he is good at vision and values and has turned the school around. He is no more important than anyone else and all have responsibility, but he has a bit more authority. The job is pressured but not so bad and he feels he is well remunerated.

He has just been headhunted as CEO of a multi-academy trust. Again, the money is good but it is not about money. Rather, it is a chance to influence at a high level, meeting with MPs and having an opportunity to tell local government and the Department of Education what it is really like in education.

Faith is a big thing for him and it has also opened doors for him. He sort of fell the Church of England , Chiefly as a result of meeting his wife , having left Roman Catholic

Church after leaving school after leaving RC in school. Being a member of the Church of England congregation also allowed him to get this job and it gives additional moral purpose to be a Christian – to be the best.

<u>Vignette analysis</u>

Peter's interview yielded nines vignettes.   Only two related to his childhood, an interesting fact in itself, while six related to his teaching career. Three main themes were discerned.

<u>Theme 1 – Father/parental object prioritising own needs over that of the child/self</u>

In three vignettes, The CD Player, The Boy in Care and Parental Separation, analysis reveals a pattern of parents not meeting needs appropriately – or at all. Peter had already referred to his mother being "tough" and emotionally closed as a result of life circumstances, something he worked to avoid in his own development. In the "CD Player", attempts to meet a basic need (to shower) are blocked by his father's latest business venture: there are cd players stored in the shower. Symbolically it reveals a recognition that his father prioritises money over Peter's privacy (the shower is in his bed-room) or his basic needs (to keep clean). This theme is repeated in the account of his parents' divorce:

when my parents separated and he filed for bankruptcy and he wouldn't give any money and he said that I should be contributing. I was 18, I should be contributing to the family fund and that sort of thing. And he was completely money focused so was always about the money. (B, 40:19-22)

His father behaved badly and "vanished of the face of the earth" (B, 27:20), abandoning the family. He is presented as a man who prioritised his own needs at the cost of Peter and the family

A latent version of this theme is developed in the vignette, the Child in Care, the most emotionally laden vignette he gave. In this the mother (parental object) is not able to meet the need of her son and he is taken into care. Money is not spent on his needs but on hers: "she spent it on beer". Peter's attempts to care for the child ("all I wanted to do was scoop him up and put him in the back of the car" – A, 32:34) are blocked, but ultimately, through the agency of social services, the boy's needs are met.

The underlying theme of these three vignettes is that vulnerable parts of the self cannot be cared for by parents. At the same time, leading into the next theme, care and support can be found elsewhere.

Theme2: supportive /enabling others

This themes flows from theme 1, with a clear logic: to find others that can support and help. In the Boy in Care vignette this is demonstrated by Social Services taking him *into care*. It is telling that this vignette is associated with loss of control, leading to the requirement to find an external container for support: the parent cannot contain childhood needs and anxiety.

In the U, Peter recounts the role of a teacher encouraging him to work harder for his A – levels after a U in his mock exams:

she was keeping an eye on it and she knew I needed to fail… but afterwards she sat down and she said "Look, you've got six months left, you've just got to do it, you can do it, just do it. (B, 34:16-17)

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Prior to this Peter had relied on innate intelligence and was by his own account "liv[ing] with underachievement" (B: 26:32). The failure was a shock and he needed the presence of a thoughtful adult to re-orientate him. Again, as with the Boy in Care, the level of containment is partial and he struggles with regrets about lack of effort but it does offer a stimulus against laziness and a model for him in terms of his career choice:

And regret's a strong word but you look back and think oh, if I'd chosen differently then… and I suppose that comes into my own job now, and my own children and the kids here grab that opportunity. If it's there, grab it, because it'll go, it'll fleetingly just vanish and you'll never get that opportunity again. And I suppose I'm passing my learned wisdom onto other people now because it's too late for me to do those things (B, 26:32- 27:2).

In the Benign Tutor, Peter recounts the moment he realised that teaching was for him:

I think it was year nine class, we were paired up, trainees were paired up and one did the beginning of the lesson, one did the middle and I got the beginning and I stood up and I looked out, saw this class and Chris was at the back and he smiled at me and I thought, I wasn't… my heart wasn't thumping, I was fine, I can do this, I'm able to do this. And it was all right, it wasn't great, but I knew this is what I wanted to do. (A, 28: 31 – 29:3)

The witnessing of Chris, a key figure in this time period, is the containing presence of an alternative adult, one outside of the parental unit, who, like his physics teacher, enabled him to become something greater than his tendency toward low achievement might have permitted.

In these vignettes, the unifying theme is that of protective, supportive and enabling adult presences that support him in ways that his own parents could not. At the same time, there is evidence that Peter is striving to integrate aspects of the paternal object into his own identity, worked out through the way he takes up his role. This is discussed further below.

Theme 3: ambivalence and the rewards of risk

Peter regards his career with some ambivalence. He would call his memoir "My Stumble to Headship" (B, 23:8) but even during his PGCE resolved that "if I was going to do this [teaching], I was going to be a head" (B, 28:17-18). Four vignettes, all associated with his career, reflect this ambivalence. In his account of getting on the PGCE course, his second and third job in teaching and his eventual headship (and a subsequent CEO role) his approach was very much to try his luck. He rings up the PGCE course in the holidays and the maths tutor is the only one there. He gets offered a place. He rings up a head and says" I'm a bit of a wild card" but is told to apply anyway and gets the assistant headship. Seconded to another school, he advises the head to create a deputy head role for behaviour and is offered it. There for eighteen months, his wife rings him and tells him of a headship advert (his current role), deadline tomorrow, and he applies, getting it. In all these accounts there is a sense of avoiding risk by taking a risk. There is no real threat of rejection or failure because he applies on the hoof, as a wild card, who, realistically, is unlikely to get it.

This pattern of behaviour – a cheeky chap winging it – has a clear model in his father, "cocky… and...did what he liked for the whole of his life" (B, 26:8-9). As Peter acknowledges, he sees his father when he looks in the mirror. But he rebelled, choosing to work for something other than money – a rebuff of paternal values. At the same

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time, money featured frequently in our discussion; being a head is a "well-paid job" and he never thought he would earn such an amount. He actually mentions "money" twenty-one times in his interviews! His account suggests that Peter has been able to rework aspects of the father into his career: the cocky chancer after money is reworked in the choice of a career that is not about money, where he could take risks in getting jobs and which ultimately remunerates him well.

Thus, it can be said that an internal task for Peter was the integration of his father, a person whose values he had rejected in the past and that this is played out in the way he applies for and takes up new roles.   This idea, while not explicit, is made clearer in the way in which Peter conceives of the organisation and his role in it.

<u>Peter's organisational drawing</u>

Peter drew a central dot with a series of concentric circles, with him "as the dot at the very centre of that and then everything rippling out from my leadership" (B, 1: 7). This includes SLT, teachers, students, the church and the community as a whole. While at the centre, Peter also conceives of his role as being "a filter", equipped with sufficient authority to decide what external demands the school must respond to. The positioning and the task, then, are paradoxical to a degree, possibly a reflection of the ambivalence discussed above. And while he is in charge, he recognises that he is a very small dot and that

I don't actually do a huge amount. I don't physically do a huge amount in the school for an organisation this big: but I do set the tone for the majority of what goes on. (B, 1:16-17).

The idea that he does not do much is mentioned several times and has clear parallels with his lazy dad. And yet, Peter does "not very much" in service to something bigger than himself, not just for money. The way he sets up his role and relation to the school-as-a-whole implies that there are is some important unconscious work at play.

<u>The experience of being a headteacher</u>

 Peter loves his job. He is doing something he loves, he gets to work with young people every day and being part of a Church school offers a way of supporting the community. At the same time, it is hard. He does admit that it is "all-consuming" and that a head needs to be able to switch off. He acknowledges that for some heads the risk of losing one's job for poor performance is real but that he has not experienced it. Reviewing the data, the following pressures and demands were identified:

- Filtering Information. Peter observed that "one of the biggest challenges for heads now is to filter" (B, 1:25). He is "bombarded" by Governors, the Church, the Local Authority and the DfE. Peter acts as a filter "because I have the authority to do that" (B, 1:28). He reviews external demands and decides what is allowed through.

- Finance. Finance is the biggest issue and balancing the books is incredibly hard because "[this] is a very low funded authority and we're a high cost area" (B, 15: 33). The regular changes in Government policy means that there is an absence of certainty. The real pressure is that the only way to save money, then, is "getting rid of people off the payroll, and that hurts the community" (B, 6:4-

5). So while the primary pressure is money, Peter is very aware of the impact of redundancies of staff, the school and the community.

- Performance and progress. Inspection by OFSTED is stressful and as head he "bore the brunt of it. Those two days, I took the hit; I took every single hit and I was the one getting battered" (B, 7:13-14) but Peter sees it as a necessity. League Tables, however, are unhelpful because of variation of ability in each year. There is also significant pressure to deliver on core and other subjects

- Care for staff and students. Peter identified the risk of becoming detached from the emotional needs of the school, something he resists. There are students who struggle and 160 staff; "some of those staff are struggling and probably the only person in the whole school who knows the whole story about everything is me. The task is to compartmentalise it and not "let it drag you under" (B, 16:24).

Historically, a big stressor was his existing SLT. They had been at the school for a long time and had, until a poor OFSTED result, believed they were a good school. "I had to sit there and say "what you've done hasn't worked!"" (B, 17:3). This was hard and he reiterates, without elaborating, that the senior team was difficult. One result of this was that he was initially more directive of staff, while trying to develop a sense of delegated responsibility. At first everything came to him but over time, his deputies and then department leaders began to take responsibility. This was not just for their own departments but for the school as a whole: "it was about making it better for everybody, which was really good, and that idea of getting the bigger picture" (B, 18:10-11).

One outcome of this increased delegated responsibility is that Peter feels he does not really do much. He sets the vision and the tone but the rest is done by his staff. In discussion he articulated two models of his leadership approach, drawing on his

organisational drawing. The first was that of the conductor: "I set the tone" (A, 1:17). The second was that of a systemic engineer:

I've engineered the unit and it will run and I'll tweak it and make it work better and it'll cough and splutter occasionally and we'll change the filters or whatever needs doing but it's not about me. (B, 20:10-12)

While he carries the can and overall responsibility he is not more important than another constituent part of the system. Interestingly, he described the only time he is more directly involved is during crises. For example when a member of staff committed suicide he became noticeably more directive. Crisis, adrenaline stimulate him into action.

A final point, reiterated several times, is that it is not about Peter as a leader but about the school as an organisation:

As soon as it becomes about you and about you getting up the ladder and about your success, then it starts falling apart because you make bad decisions. And it's about the whole. (B, 20:21-23)

This is a rational, unsurprising comment. But exploring unconscious links it is possible to propose a link here between Peter's relationship to the school and that of his father to the family, with is tendency to prioritise his own needs.

Peter's account of his experiences reveals a number of pressures and demands which he reports he is able to manage. In the next section some of the overt and less overt ways of doing so are explored, with particular attention on unconscious processes and templates that provide Peter with sufficient containment to remain in touch with the needs of the school.

How does Peter manage the demands of the role?

Peter is evidently a strong and successful head. He has natural intelligence and leadership qualities, which he has augmented through experience and study. An important fact that emerges from his account is that Peter does not feel stressed. Actually he enjoys the job and appears energised by the challenge. What follows suggests that a main reason for this is that, for him, the role and the work is reparative of earlier upsets and hurts, as identified in the vignettes above. The very demands of the job contain and allow him to integrate parental objects in a very interesting way.

Laziness, inactivity-in-role and the parental object

Peter describes part of his role in terms of inaction. He says several times that he does not do much but is able to recognise that he has developed, through a culture of delegated responsibility, a successful, happy school. At the same time, there is something about these statements that suggests he is not fully at ease with this (something supported by counter-transference experiences in these interviews – tension and uncertainty, a worry of not doing the interview right). His perspective on "not doing anything" oscillates between a quality of a good leader who delegates and encourages staff to take responsibility and an indication of his own laziness.

It is in the description of laziness that an unconscious preoccupation signals itself, for Peter associates it with his father: "I'm naturally lazy, I'm bone idle… That's my father all over" (B, 34:33). This is dangerous territory for, as noted in the vignettes, his father was unable to meet Peter and his family's needs. Left to his own devices the fear for Peter is that he would end up like his father, would become his father. It is for this reason that it is argued that Peter relishes the demands of the role. These external demands act as a spur and call him beyond himself. His role, for the most part is

"setting the tone" but crises (he gives most detail when talking about managing the suicide of a staff member) and the demands of the job engage him and energise him in a way that is almost a form of salvation – from becoming like his father. The role and his career in general honour his "itchy feet" (paternal similarity) in a way that is productive and supportive. There is something in his role conception that is reparative and offers the promise of integration of parts of his psyche, in this instance the father. Put another way the demands of the job energise him out of the pitfall of laziness, the symbolic quality of the father he wants to not be.

The school demands the best of him

The demands of the school, then, play an interesting role in his psychology: the school represents an entity in and of itself (Wells, 1985) that Peter consciously and unconsciously must relate to. And he does, stating that "it's an organisation but it's a community, it's living and breathing and we are together as family in its loosest sense and we have to get along and share that." (B, 36:7-8). There are obvious echoes to the family his father left and for which he demanded eighteen-year old Peter support financially.

It also calls to mind other, supportive, adults: his physics Teacher in the U vignette and his Tutor on his PGCE. Just like them, the school is supportive but asks for the best of him. Faith and being a church school play a part in this: "if we're a Christian school, we should be the best school" (B, 19:11). It also, through this containing demand, meets certain ego needs in such a way that he can now state "it is not about me personally, it's about the organisation" (B, 37:26-27). By conceptualising the school as a supportive, containing entity *that needs him*, it allows him to take up a role that is not based on ego needs but the realities of the school and people in it. He is able to

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remain in contact with reality through the depressive position and acquire something that is a powerful anti-dote to stress: meaning and purpose. He has a moral compass (in part from the church) that guides him. "It is not about the money" (B, 19:13), it is about providing psychological provender for the school/family through his role as head. It is also interesting to observe that after only three years in post he is leaving the school for another role, a time frame he acknowledges as rather quick, as if those "itchy feet", symbol of the paternal object, reworked as it is, must still be honoured.

The sublimation of disappointment

Further analysis of the data suggests that there is an additional deeper meaning for Peter in managing the demands of the role. He spoke of his own disappointments about school and not trying harder. There were lost opportunities and, being in charge of a school is a way of ensuring others work hard and take up opportunities, as quoted above. Peter's comments and the emotion attached to it suggest that he is deploying the mature defence of sublimation in the reworking of an earlier disappointment into something more socially useful (Shaw, 2002). It is sublimation that helps to transmute the demands of the role of a headteacher away from debilitating stress towards something energising, adaptive and useful to the whole. For Peter, it is argued, it allows him a two-fold release: to repair the biting disappointment of his own lack of effort and also to offer a way of avoiding full identification with paternal laziness – and all that that implies. The demands are therefore welcome.

Peter's conception of his role is multi-layered. There is a conscious awareness of the task and he has the qualities to meet this. Simultaneously, the workings of the unconscious influence and shape his conception of the role and how he relates to the school to perform a dual function: the job at hand, consciously, and; unconsciously,

symbolic reparations linked to his own past. It is through the latter that Peter is able to develop an attitude that meets demands and pressures in an individual and uniquely successful manner: he is energised by them. A key dilemma, his interviews suggest, is how to avoid being like his father when he has so many inherited traits. This dilemma was compounded by the fact that he purposefully chose a path ulterior to that of his father, by choosing a job for interest not money. The idea that reparative work has been undertaken and that the role of headteacher offered this is supported by the multiple references to it not being about money but being, at the same time, well-paid. Peter, it is argued, has succeeded in integrating aspects of the father (money orientated, always moving on, lazy) psychologically, through the development of his role as a headteacher. The work and its demands were a container permitting him to do powerful psychological work that then allowed him to remain effectively in touch with reality and the demands of the role. He is helped by the work because the work helped him.

The next participant is Shelley. It will be shown that the approaches she deployed to improve the school have important psychological benefits, helping her to integrate two central themes inherited from her father.

Participant C: Shelley

"And if somebody's making it look easy that is exactly what they're doing. I can't believe that this job doesn't take bits out of you."

Shelley is a fifty-five year old woman of Irish-Bangladeshi, Catholic-Muslim parents, a fact that plays a big role in her life. This is her second headship and she has recently led the school to "Outstanding". As with the previous participants, the purpose here is

to explore how the unconscious influences the ways in which a headteacher construes her role and the organisation she is part off. Analysis of her account of her parents, her childhood and her path to teaching reveal unconscious patterns that shape how she makes sense of her role and responds to the stresses and strains of it. In her account, there is a powerful projection of vulnerability into the school and this highlights the usefulness of this approach for EPs working at the systemic and at the individual level: whose vulnerability is the school concerned about?

Shelley's Pen Portrait

Shelley is a 55 year-old woman. She is now the executive head of two secondary schools, one for boys and one for girls. Shelley is the eldest of four children born to a Bangladeshi father and Irish mother. Her father was Muslim and her mother Catholic. A great deal of her narrative revolved around the lives of her parents, in particular her father. He had a varied, interesting but also quite tragic life. He was orphaned young, blaming himself, she thinks, for his mother's death. He came to the UK and met her mother, whilst they were letting rooms. Their socially isolated status (this at a time of "No Blacks, no Irish), led to a close attachment and they married against the wishes of both families. Her father never saw his older brother again as a result of his choice and there was similar animosity on her mother's side. The family moved between Britain and Bangladesh, with Shelley being borne in the UK. She attended six different schools before settling in Surrey.

Many of her stories relate to the uncertainty and chaos of the world, as seen through her father's eyes. He was making a good living as an investment banker and then "threw it all away", leaving to set up a business that went badly wrong. This was allied

to a world view that there is a danger "out there", something effectively confirmed by the financial difficulties the family kept ending up in.

Shelley's father was very interested in her education and there was no doubt that she would go to university. This love of learning and of ideas she got from her father, while her mother was less interested in such things. Indeed, her mother is silent in her account, present but over-shadowed by her husband, Shelley's father. In secondary school she became aware of other families and the different ways families operated and related. In 6th form she was introduced to ideas and new friends and this was a very stimulating time of life. Her English teacher was particular influential and she selected the same to study English as a result of her. She actually found University difficult and in her third year had a "meltdown". As a result she did not get the 2:1 she was on course for but a 2:2, a source of "deep shame" for her. As a result she did not follow her dream of moving into academia but joined a PGCE course, training as an English teacher.

She returned south and took up a post as an English teacher. Her best job was as Assistant Head in charge of 6th form. Something in her nature – impatience – made her apply for a post in another school, even though she was happy and was told a promotion was coming. She was unhappy at the other school but grew as a Deputy Head. The headteacher gave her lots of responsibility and really brought her on. Her father's response to the news of her promotion was odd: he replied "how can they take this away from you?" Shelley then went on to be a headteacher at a mixed comprehensive and enjoyed good success there, after some initial difficulties with grades. It was a demanding role and really brouht her in touch with her values of inclusion and the need for a safe area in which learning can occur.

When the school achieved an "Outstanding" from OFSTED, she began to think about moving on, eventually doing so, moving to an all-girls comprehensive, where she is

currently. Shelley often wonders why she does this moving and making things hard for her but **does so anyway. The job is stressful but she does enjoy it.**

Vignette Analysis

Analysis of Shelley's interview yielded thirteen discernible vignettes that covered a time frame from the meeting of her parents (a highly important story for her) through to her deputy headship. Perhaps most striking is that nine of these featured her father, suggesting that he played and continues to play a significant role in her life – externally and internally. Once identified the vignettes were classified under two headings. These are considered next.

Theme 1: the world is cruel, uncertain and unfair.

The impression that the world can be a hostile and unsafe place was found in six themes. In "Father's note" Shelley introduces her parents at their first meeting. Both were far from home in London at a time when "they still had signs, 'no blacks or Irish', you know, so they fell into both of those categories"(C, 28:12-13). They fall in love and, defying both families, marry. There are unhappy long term consequences as both families cut them off. In his note to his wife, Shelley's father conveys a sense of the two of them in love, with only each other to trust, "This is Helen the day after she has just returned from Ireland having spoken to her mother of the ordeal When will this ordeal finish? But she is happy and I am glad" (A, 27:26). This sense of societal rejection and the risk of following one's heart is amplified in the vignette describing their marriage (Two Weddings). Her father's parents died when he was a child and he moved across India during the turbulence of Partition to live with his older brother who subsequently rejected him for marrying a white catholic.

Harshness and uncertainty are presented differently in "Father Quits Job". A successful banker, her father quits his job, with disastrous results: plans do not bear fruit and trusted people let him down badly. Shelley feels some guilt about this, as he used to confide in her about his plans. Later she admits that she worries she may make a similarly reckless decision that will ruin her career. Her father's wariness of imminent disaster is presented in its most striking form when she proudly tells her father that she has got a promotion:

and I remember him standing at the cooker with a fag hanging out of his mouth and he said, "Well, so how could they take that away from you? What would have to happen? Gross misconduct? (C, 41:14-17).

The idea of impending disaster and uncertainty are, in each case, linked to Shelley's father and in her accounts she continues to wrestle with this idea, fearing that she may behave like him while expressing utter puzzlement that he should assume such a thing. Her stories and the prevalence of her father in them indicate a link in her inner world between the paternal object and a cruel, harsh world that one must be prepared for at all times. Poignantly, there is a replication of sorts of this in her time at university (Vignette 13: the 2:2) where she gets a 2:2 after an unspecified crisis occurs. As she commented "I threw it all away" (C, 41:22). This seems unfair, given the implied upheaval she was having to deal with (family moving to Holland, her father's failed business, personal crises) but the possibility of moving into academia and doing a PhD was indeed "taken away".

<u>Theme 2: Importance of education as a form of development and protection</u>

The second theme to emerge is that of education being important, as a form of development, but also as a way of offering protective alternatives – in this case to the anticipation of catastrophe discussed above.   Shelley's father evidently valued education and had plans for his daughter:

And he wanted us to enjoy the benefits of English education. That was always, always a major thing for him. So from the moment I was old enough to understand, I knew I was going to university, there was no choice, that's what I was going to do."

(C, 29:6-8).

This is returned to in "Love of Learning", where Shelley recognises that "learning, I think has been, always been something that I've found an awful lot of satisfaction in, just learning for its own sake" (C, 41:32-33). She concludes that this love was from her father. His emphasis on education and learning is returned to often and the picture emerges, through the vignettes, of him as a powerful internal object who represents both a fear of calamity and education as insulation against it.

This love of learning also comes from outside of the family. In Vignette 8 (Surrey Families) Shelley recounts a time of greater stability in the family as they settle in Surrey:

then we got to secondary, that's the period of time that I would say the family was most settled and we lived in Surrey and we didn't move around at all then, it was a very stable time. (C, 34:9-11)

It is important to reflect on this; for Shelley there is a confluence of family stability with arrival at secondary school and opportunities for learning, which she enjoyed. Indeed, reflecting further she comments,

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I think a lot of what I do in school now as a head teacher is try to recreate that [stability] for young people because it was a real time of where I found out what my strengths were, where I got a lot of approbation, where I got this sense that I could be other than perhaps what I was at home I suppose. (C, 34:13-16)

This discovering of new ways of being is reiterated in an identification with an English Teacher at secondary school who noticed and encouraged her, to the point that Shelley chose English as a degree subject and went to the same university that her teacher had.

It is an interesting aside that in her narrative, it is during this time that her father "kept going off places but the family stayed put" (C, 34:11-12). It suggests, reading it as an account of unconscious dynamics, that the absence of an overwhelming parental presence allowed for other influences to emerge and for new figures to be introjected. The selection of subject, university and career (the influence of her English teacher) strongly point to this being the case here.

Shelley's organisational drawing

When asked to pictorially represent the school and her role in it, she drew a picture of a house with her standing at the door: "I put myself at the door because I think my job is to get people to come in and be part of [it]" (C, 1:26-27). Having drawn this, she felt the need to add some specific words: "home; safe; secure; happy; together; supportive; learning; safe challenge" and returned several times to the ideas of safety and stability, mentioning "safe" eleven times in her interviews. She described it as "lots of space around it but actually it's a safe space and a stable, safe structure. That's quite safe, isn't it?" (C, 2:1-2).

She expressed surprise at just how boring her drawing was, adding "that surprised me how… While all of these words, safe, secure, it's not about risk taking necessarily; it's kind of risk within a safe area" (C, 2:7-8). The drawing has clear links to the themes discussed above, presenting her conception of the school as something that provides safety and security, the very things her introjected father's worldview were concerned about.

The next section will explore her experiences as a headteacher before going on to make links between her unconscious priorities, as identified in the vignettes, and the drawing, and the way in which she formulates and manages the demands of the role.

<u>The experience of being a headteacher</u>

Shelley approaches the role with a strong moral sense and a duty of care to look after students and staff. This is her second headship and with over a decade of experience behind her she is better able to manage the responsibilities and the vicissitudes of the job: "… I used to worry what is going to happen next, because it was such a precarious…" (C, 19:30-31). Now, she has got used to the idea that "the buck stops with [me] and it is not as terrifying as it used to be, because you've got more history behind you, you've got more proven experience that you can rely on and you can use that" (C, 19:16-19). Tenacity helps, as does the belief that "time and the hour run through the roughest day" (C, 18:2-3).

There are, nevertheless, real pressures in the job and she has written resignation letters for both schools which were not accepted. The pressures and demands do

take bits out of you. Just the hours you have to work; the number of evenings you have to do; the number of times you are called to account"(C, 17:26-28)

And

you are always kind of on tenterhooks about what's the next disaster going to be? Am I going to be equal to it? (C, 10:13-14)

Reflecting on pressure she commented

Honestly, I would say I would experience some level of extreme stress at least once a week, where you just think, 'what am I doing this job for? (C, 17:21-22)

Analysing Shelley's statements about the demands and stresses of the role produce three distinct sources of stress; those external to the school, the demands and expectations of the people in the school and the pressures she places on herself.

<u>External pressures</u>

Shelley observed there has been a change in OFSTED reporting, where the performance of the head is the first thing mentioned in an OFSTED Judgement: "when you read the OFSTED report it's about the head teacher nowadays, as opposed to necessarily the whole school in that sense." (C. p. 15. L. 5-7); "But I think there's this pressure that the head is able to make x, y and z happen and you comment on whether they have made x, y and z happen; that's the first sentence nowadays" (C. p.15. l. 18-20).

Another source of pressure is the Academy trust which runs her school: "they generally add pressure rather than take it away" (C, 18:23-24). Part of that external pressure is the focus a head is subject to. She recounted an incident in which the Regional Schools Commissioner asked the Trust if he could come to her school: "A big fuss and bother from [Academy], "oh god he's coming in, oh, we need to give him the wow factor". I'm thinking, "Well, no pressure there then."(C, 14:30-32) These external pressures

take their toll. Shelley recounted a time when they were "done good and proper" by a team of six senior HMIs. These were "dark times, where I just thought "I can't do this job. It's impossible for me" (C, 20:28-29).

Within school pressures.

Shelley described a current list of practical concerns including redundancies, a restructuring proposal and a merger of schools. Teacher recruitment was a concern, as was finance: "I've got a lot of financial issues at the moment, really dire ones. And then you've got the day-to-day stuff like, 'a teacher's handed in their resignation, what do I do? Got a failing maths teacher, what do I do?'" (C, 17:2-4) Shelley highlighted a sense of duty to staff and students, that points to deeper preoccupations. Her response to being asked what is was like to be a head revealed a concern for the vulnerable; "you're very conscious that this is a place where you're entrusted to look after people, and young people and sometimes very vulnerable people" (C, 2:21-23). She goes on to observe,

you have children that are really, really at risk. Or if they're not at risk, because the other thing is that you've got to try and make sure that they're all safe from each other as well. (C. p.2. l. 31- p. 3. l.2)

A major task is to protect the vulnerable despite her school being in an affluent area of the county. It is argued that psychological projection may be at play here, re-locating some of her own vulnerabilities into the school. This is further demonstrated when she talks about her Leadership Team. Asked where they would be in her drawing she says:

I think they'd be with me or around doing the headteacher function. But they're the team, family that will be close knit, has loyalty to each other, isn't competitive with

each other in any kind of bitter sibling rivalry way. And they feel they can flourish individually but also as a team, but very much like a functioning family if there is such a thing. (C, 15:29-33)

In other words, this is a team, a family, with no discord or conflict, unlike her own family. Shelley sees herself as the "eldest", as she is in her family, "the person that has to look after the others"(C,16:12) and describes some of the pressure coming from this position: during an OFSTED inspection, there is part of her thinking, "'I just want to scream right now' but then you're thinking, 'I can't do that because they [the SLT] need to see that the centre isn't crumbling, and I also have a duty to look after you'." (C, 16:7-9). Exporting and locating her own vulnerability in her SLT mobilises her to remain strong and look after them, and by extension, the school-as-a-whole.

She sums up her experience of these demands in a way that is reminiscent of her father's sense of permanent threat and catastrophe: "it's that sense of responsibility again: what am I going to do? How do I solve this*? You're always kind of on tenterhooks about what the next disaster is going to be.* Am I going to be equal to it?" (Italics added). (C, 10:13-14).

Shelley's accounts of within school pressures begin with quotidian demands that any head might describe. She then moves to describe demands concerned with keeping "vulnerable" students safe, before explicitly likening her SLT to a functioning family. These comments give form to the unconscious preoccupations shaping her role; protecting what is vulnerable, keeping it safe from an uncertain world and ensuring it is allowed to develop through education. A picture starts to emerge in which Shelley projects aspects of herself into the school in such a way that she can look after them

and keep them safe. This sense of projection is amplified when she talks about the pressures she places on herself, next.

Internal pressures

The pressures described above come from sources external – or perceived as such - to Shelley. But there are also pressures she places on herself. Having recently been awarded an Outstanding from OFSTED was an initial cause of justified celebration,

And then reality kicks in which is one, you've got live up to it, and two, in my head I'm thinking, 'we're not outstanding every day and I've now got to do that with the boys, haven't I? How am I going to do that?' When I didn't even think I'd ever achieve it anywhere suddenly the ante is upped. So, the stress, even though it looks like to other people outside, I'm sure colleague heads are thinking, 'she's all right. She's sitting pretty, isn't she?' it doesn't feel like that. (C, 13:23-28)

Shelley recognises that this is "me putting pressure on me because fundamentally you feel like you are not as good as your press" (C, 14:15-16). Indeed, behind the role she is a "flawed human being just like anybody else" (C, 14:17), one who feels the role entails an element of "having to be omniscient" (C, 14:17). This term is telling in itself, as omniscience, like omnipotence, can be a powerful defence against anxiety, entailing a split between the knowing self, with the experience of not knowing being projected out of the self. From her comments about vulnerability, there is a strong indication that some of the more uncertain and vulnerable parts of the self are projected into the school and its population. Certainly, given her sense of duty and responsibility, the fear of letting others down is a significant stressor for her.

A final point of real importance is how Shelley conceives of and relates to the school-as-a-whole. She is very clear that it is "an extension of myself" (C, 6:12), something that shocked her as she said it. Shelley's description of the school as an extension of herself explains her relationship to the school and the related pressures, and how she responds psychologically to these pressures. It is this that is discussed next.

How does Shelley manage the demands of the role?

It has been shown that Shelley experiences significant amounts of stress, related to the role from extra- and intra-psychic sources. These stresses revolve around responsibility, sense of duty, performance and expectation and, importantly, protection of the vulnerable from risk. At a more explicit level Shelley has found helpful things such as humour ("having a laugh"; C, 18:30), taking a wider, longer perspective ("time and the hour run through the roughest day"; C, 18:3-4) and tenacity help manage the pressures of the role. It is very clear from her responses that her values and sense of morality are strong drivers to helping her persist and do what she considers right and necessary. The role comes with a sense of responsibility and duty which she feels obligated to fulfil, and which in turn sustains her. The focus of this study is on unconscious factors that help her make sense of and manage the demands of the role.

In the analysis of her vignettes there is a strong indication that Shelley introjected and, at least partially, identified with her father and his values, accepting some and rejecting others. Her father's valuing of education has been a guiding force in her life, merging with her experiences of an encouraging English teacher (and others), something that contributed to her choice of teacher as a profession. For her, education signifies security and growth. Indeed, it can be argued that becoming a teacher was a reparative salve after the disappointment of the 2:2 ended her PhD ambitions. More implicit in

her comments is the central predicate of her father's life, introjected and identified with but also resisted, that calamity is close and the world is dangerous: "how can they take that away from you?". The prevalence of this theme in the vignettes highlights the centrality of the idea in Shelley's unconscious, even if she does not want to give in to it. She does, however, talk about potential disasters awaiting her. Exploring her comments and her organisational drawing through a psychoanalytic lens permits a deeper interrogation of her comments as well: the image of a house, with Shelley as a boundary-keeper ensuring the "vulnerable" are kept safe, suggests that the world is still seen as unpredictable. Her guiding principle is to keep the vulnerable safe enough to learn. This is important as her conception of the role and the organisation effectively manage a tension highlighted in her vignettes: the world is dangerous but finding a safe place to learn gives security and opportunity.

Analysis of the data suggests a link between her experiences as a headteacher and formative experiences as a child and young person that serves to mitigate the impact of stresses related to the role: education helped her, so, as a headteacher, she can help others. In fact, it is more than just this: there is evidence to suggest that in taking up this role and ensuring the safe learning environment of others, Shelley is providing a safe space for herself.

<u>Projection of vulnerability.</u>
Shelley's chief preoccupation is to ensure the vulnerable are safe and secure in a "home" that she can protect. This by definition implies dangers outside from which the vulnerable must be protected. The need to put key words like "safe" down when the task prohibited words demonstrates how important this is for her, and not just as a

rational, conscious adult. Taken intra-psychically, it can be asked, just who is protecting whom?

Psychoanalytically speaking, her preoccupation with vulnerability and managing a safe "home" takes on a new dimension, in which her own vulnerability is located outside of herself. Several times she talks about omniscience and to be omniscient, all-knowing, requires the unknowing parts to be spit off and projected elsewhere. Furthermore, when Shelley says "the school is an extension of myself" (C, 6:12), it can be taken quite literally: it is an extension of her psyche and the various objects within it, including her younger vulnerable self, at home with a loved but sometimes volatile father. Certainly, exposure to the threats implied in his world view (internalised by her) would exacerbate tension, as she suggests it does when she refers to the next disaster waiting to happen. By projecting vulnerability into students, she is better able to take up the role of protector and gate-keeper, to keep them safe.

This is a classic example of the type of psychological containment that leadership, as a boundary function performs (Rice, 1969). It is explicit in her organisational drawing. One can infer, therefore, that projection of vulnerability is a critical component in Shelley's ability to manage the stresses of the role and remain in thoughtful contact with the organisation. She contains the school, allowing it to function, as it did during OFSTED, despite the young SLT. This, in turn allows her to do her job. But it does more than that, as is discussed next.

Shelley sets up a school for herself

The two central themes of her vignettes are threat from an uncertain world and the importance of education. In her account it is clear that her experience at secondary

school, meeting friends and coming into contact with ideas and literature opened up a new world for her. It is perhaps telling that she makes a number of literary references when talking about how she deals with pressure, signalling the impact school, her English teacher and literature had on her: school was transformative. As a headteacher she then described her task as ensuring she keeps the school (home) safe and secure enough for (vulnerable) children to learn.

The parallels between task conception and unconscious preoccupation are striking: as a boundary-keeper in possession of legitimate authority to make changes within the school, Shelley has recreated the very environment that was so transformative for her. In other words, she has, through her role, created the very environment her more vulnerable self needed in order to develop. She created the safe-enough-to-learn environment her teenage self flourished in, and this allows her to take up the current task of running a school. It is a dual task, effective in the present and protective of her own adolescent vulnerability. By setting up, boundary-managing and containing the school, she contains herself and meets, not just symbolically, the needs of her younger self; a safe learning environment where difference and vulnerability are accepted and learning is made possible.

These are complex processes that, it is argued, could only be discerned through a psychoanalytic epistemology. It can depict that what is done externally through the role of headteacher is experienced internally as a nurturing act for the parts of the self vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life, as Shelley, through identification with her father, well knows. Conceiving of the school as an extension of the psyche and projecting the weaker parts of herself into its safe middle, Shelley can face outwards, strong enough

to withstand external demands and with enough power to ensure the school is set up in the way that best served her. By doing so, she achieves a level of internal integration.

School synthesises her unconscious concerns in a manageable way.

The final way her role conception helps her manage stress is to do with integration. Much of the stress she identifies is internal. Her father, as an internal object, it is argued, holds a dual function: representation of the reminder that uncertainty and threat are "out there" and; a valuing of education. As noted, whilst these assumptions have been introjected, Shelley struggles to resist this catastrophic view, with mixed results. But there is a key difference now. Shelley is in charge. She, like her father, values education and is able to ensure this possibility is offered to others. She recognises that she could all too easily make a calamitous decision that could ruin her career like her father. And yet, she does not. Instead she flourishes and achieves an outstanding grade at OFSTED.

There is a level of integration and synthesis implied in her account of her experiences and analysis of them. Indeed, this was confirmed by her in a subsequent meeting to test out these theories. Shelley found other role models (the English teacher) who valued education, like her father, but offered a less catastrophic world view and there is evidence in her vignettes that these figures too have become an important part of her inner constellation. By following them, by providing a containing environment for herself – through the containment of others – Shelley is able to confront and master a range of threats and stresses. Doing so in a way that is so similar to the role her father held for her (lover of education in charge of the house) suggests a sophisticated reworking of older unconscious patterns in which the symbolic fears of her inner world are mastered in the outer world, through the role of the headteacher. The external

stresses she experiences and overcomes are, in an unconscious and emotional fashion, a balm to the amplified threats held by her father and still living in her (her fear of the next "calamity"). Managing them successfully, as she does, actually reduces the threats in her inner world, represented by her father. She reworks her own past fears through the take up of the role. The role allows her to contain and work on unconscious preoccupations and worries.

Analysis of Shelley's account of her past and her role conception, using a psychoanalytic frame, permits a deeper and extremely nuanced interpretation of her role. Through introjection and projection, Shelley performs a series of sophisticated unconscious functions that serve multiple purposes. She is able to contain her anxieties well enough to perform the role well. She does this through projecting vulnerable parts of the self into the school, allowing her to act as boundary keeper. In doing so, she sets up the sort of beneficent environment she described as being present for her at secondary school. Tellingly she later admits that in real life it probably wasn't like that. But through her position of power, with authority to make the necessary changes, she is able to create an environment that allows for "safe challenge", just what she needed. What is done externally for others is experienced internally for the self. Unconsciously, then, she has set up a system to meet the needs of her own unconscious preoccupations. The psyche pours itself into the role, serving a dual function in the present (for others) and in the past (for herself). This allows her to moderate the extreme sense of threat represented by her father and to even integrate these into a more robust and level psyche that is in control and that finds mastery of external pressures to be a form of containment of inner pressures, reducing them slowly.

In the next section, theoretical implications of these findings will be discussed, before considering practical and academic ramifications for EPs and headteachers.

Discussion

This research study has explored how role conception, influenced by unconscious factors from participants' own biographies, supports them in managing the demands, stresses and pressures of the role. It focused on three individual case studies using psychoanalytic theory as a specific epistemology to access aspects of their unconscious lives. As this was an idiographic study, care must be taken in extrapolating generalizable conclusions from the research. This section will comment on the main findings of this research before considering limitations. Implications in the field of headteacher and leadership studies, psychosocial research and EP practice will then be discussed.

<u>Comment on Findings</u>

Jim, Peter and Shelley present, unsurprisingly, different accounts of their role and sense of the organisation, their organisation-in-the-mind (Armstrong, 2005). It is argued in this study that the reasons for this are linked to biographical and often unconscious factors that shape role conception and relationship with the organisation-as-a-whole. There is some agreement that being a head teacher is demanding and stressful at times (although Peter insists he does very little, he does give specific details about a serious crisis he managed as an example of him taking up his role fully). In the way that they talk about and make sense of the demands of their job, however, there is much variation. The use of a psychoanalytic epistemology, with its concern with unconscious processes contributes, therefore, to the understanding of how they frame and respond to these demands. Before exploring theoretical implications it is helpful to summarise the three cases.

Jim was shown to operate from an underlying template in which benevolent, thoughtful objects work behind the scenes to create a benign environment in which qualities are noticed and individuals developed. This is the very same ethos Jim wishes to instil in his school. But the authority that permits him to advance this also exposes him to considerable stresses, as a person and as embodiment of the school; risks of psychological, professional and financial harm. To manage this, Jim projects aspects of task-related emotion into specific role holders in a way that allows him to remain thoughtful and engaged with the running of the school.

Peter's data presents a very different unconscious dynamic, revealing a situation in which the demands of the job spur him to rise above the "lazy" paternal object with which he has wrestled, leading to a successful career. Like a psychological adrenaline junkie, Peter is not stressed out by the job, but rather brought to a more meaningfully engaged life. This encourages him to be the best he can be and repair, through his responsibilities, some of the hurt done to him and his family, while providing the encouragement and motivation for students he lacked for himself. At the same time, he can take risks and make money while still serving the needs of others; when the school/family needs him, he does not behave as his father did and just disappear. The role of headteacher offers a chance for reparation and integration in his internal world.

Analysis of Shelley's data shows a woman who is able to face the demands of the role of headteacher successfully, providing a level of security (her espoused aim) for others – and herself. By projecting and identifying her own vulnerability within the school, she is able to take up a role that guarantees an environment in which it is safe enough

to learn: a reality for the students and staff she leads and, in symbolic form, for the young girl she once was.

In their different ways, the three participants have set up the schools they need for themselves. This was not, however, a conscious process and a methodology that did not attend to the unconscious would not have been able to make the nuanced and often non-logical links that a psychoanalytic epistemology, using a psychosocial methodology, was able to. As a result, a very different account of how role conception and unconscious biographical material helped and shaped ways of managing and responding to role related stresses is revealed. A deeper consideration of some of these unconscious processes and their theoretical implications are considered next.

Theoretical links

The unconscious

Hinshelwood (2009) raised the question of whether unconscious processes affect education, remarking on the separation of education and psychoanalysis. This study demonstrated the prevalence of unconscious processes at play in the lives and work of headteachers. While primitive and mature defence mechanism such as projection, projective identification, sublimation and humour are well recognised in clinical and work populations, the findings of this study offer new accounts of how these processes operate in a way that is in service to the task headteachers must perform. In each account there is the strong impression that past experiences shaped how participants view and respond to the tasks presented to them. Through the organisational drawings it is possible to get a sense of their organisations-in-mind (Armstrong, 2005), an entity in which unconscious preoccupations form around existing demands and social

structures. This is done, it is argued, in such a way that serves multiple functions. Head teachers find vessels in which they can located aspects of their inner world but do so in a way that allows for successful work to occur.

In all three cases there is a recognition of some level of organisational identification – as Shelley said, "the school is an extension of myself". Following from this, and adhering to a psychoanalytic model of a non-unitary defended subject, this must mean that within this there is a conscious and an unconscious aspect. What is shown in this study is that the unconscious plays a rich, dynamic and facilitative role in the emotional life of these headteachers. For example, Shelley's preoccupation with safety, or Peter's with money, while not consciously recognised did, when unconscious patterns were revealed, come to have a consistent logic that no rational analysis would have deciphered. Given the scope of the role, this is not surprising: when so much is asked of one, part of what is given will be unconscious material projected onto other role-holders in the organisation (like Jim), sub-systems, such as the SLT and student body (as Shelley does) or into the conceptualised organisation-as-famil as Jim does. Figure 2 demonstrates this.

Figure 2. Headteacher projects unconscious material into school, subsystems and individuals

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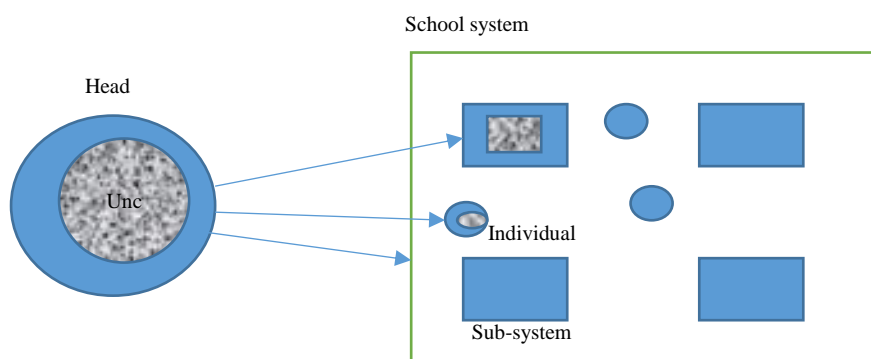
Developing this, it can be said that, in the minds of each participant, there existed an extended, unconscious metaphor, revealed by the stories they tell and how they tell them. This can be seen as framing devices for how to conceive of an entity (here the school) and how to canalise and respond to the pressures affecting it through the mediating construct of role. It is what the unconscious of the individual brings to the conception of the role and the organisation.

5.2.2 Role

This study has explored the way in which role conception offers some form of containment for headteachers. Role in the systems-psychodynamic literature is not limited to the conscious duties one takes up. It can be seen as

a mental regulating principle based on a person's living experience of the complex interaction of feelings, ideas and motivations, which are being aroused in carrying out the aim of the system, and is expressed in her purposive behaviour by the role taker (Reed, 1997, p.5).

It is much more than the formal role described in a job specification. It is the construct by which an individual is linked to the organisation in order to undertake a task. Simpler tasks require simpler roles that do not require much of the person, for example stacking shelves. The more demanding the role, the more is required. A role is not simply taken up, but first must be found and then made (Reed, 1997), a process that can take some time depending on the complexity of the task and what it calls for from an individual's psychology.

Reworking Rice's (1969) model, discussed in the literature review, it can be demonstrated just how much of an individual's personality, innate resources and unconscious are put into the role. Figure 3 depicts a shallow task that requires very little of the person[3]. Figure 4 depicts a more demanding task, with the role reaching deeper into the individual's personality system.

Figure 3: Shallow task
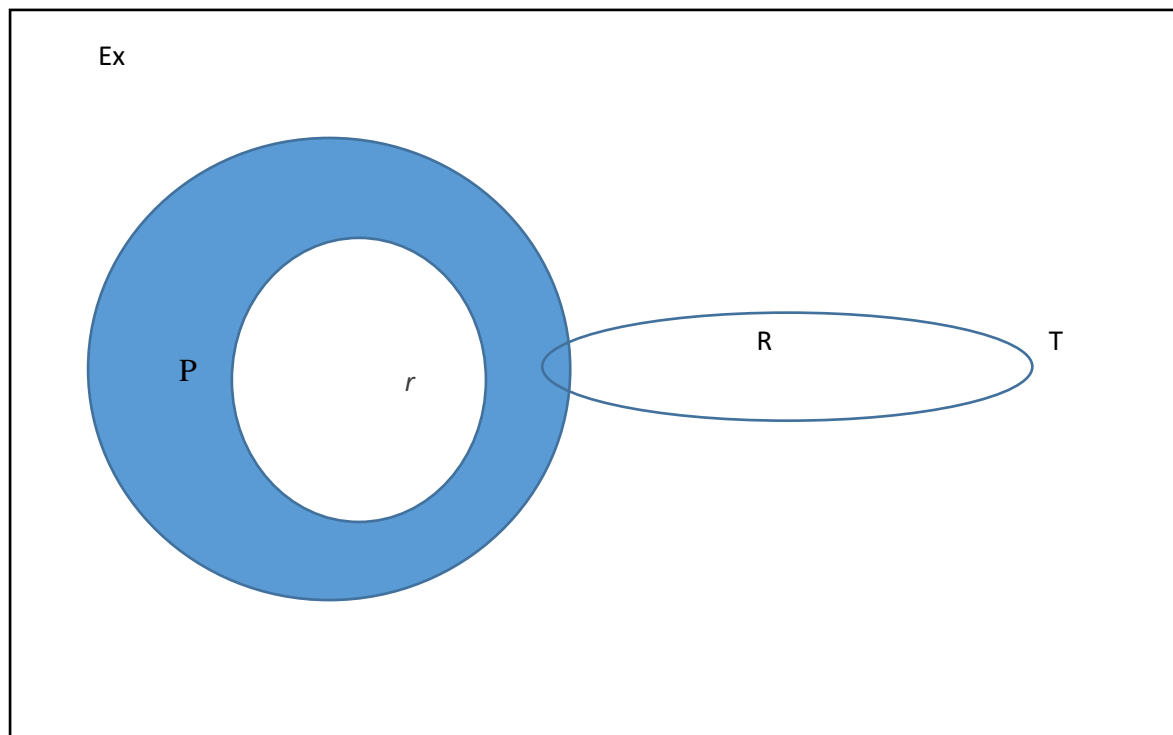
Ex=External environment of the individual
P = ego function   r= Internal world of the individual
T= task   R= Role

The more demanding the task the more the role requires of the self. For headteachers this is not just a matter of depth but also width. Conceptually it is now possible to explain why so much unconscious material can be found in headteachers' narratives with regard to their schools: the role of headteacher encompasses and requires so much of the self that it is impossible for this not to be the case. Figure 5 demonstrates this. The size and nature of the task is such that the role conception of the headteacher must

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[3] To avoid confusion with Educational Psychologists (EP), Rice's abbreviation for external environment (*Ep*) has been changed to *Ex*.

be wide enough to encompass it. And because so many of the issues heads must contend

with evoke stress and anxiety, the demands go deep into personal resources.

Figure 4: Demanding task
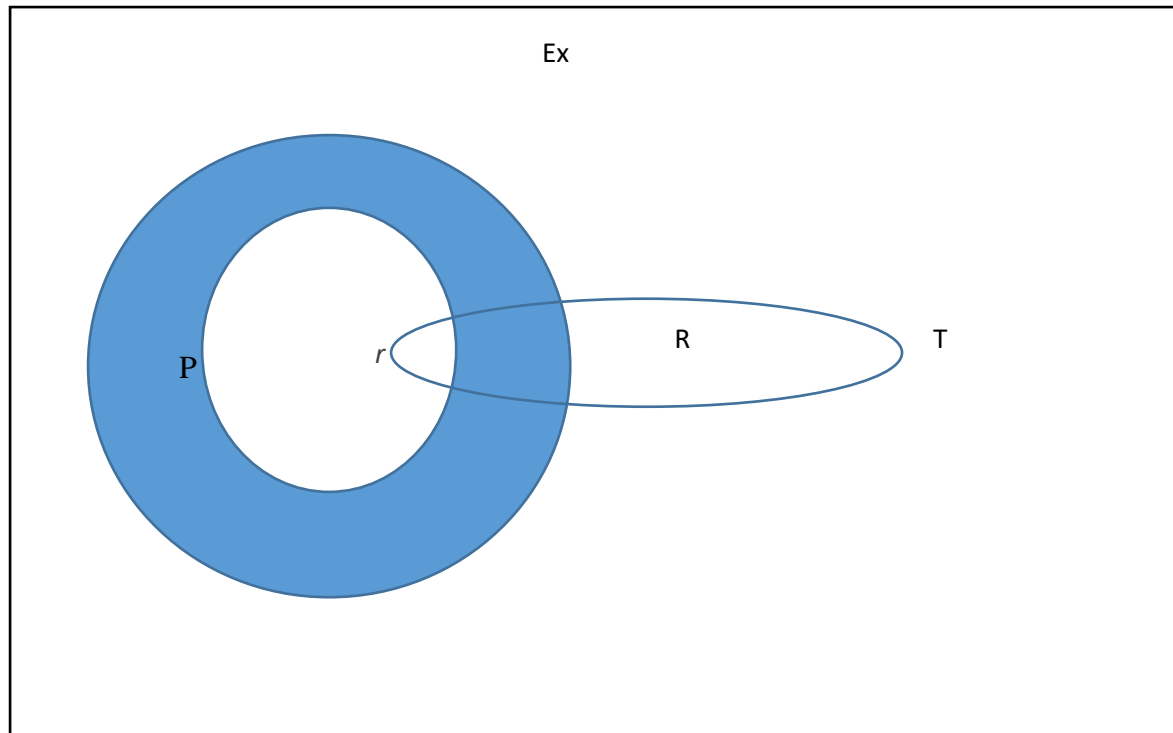
Ex=External environment of the individual
P = ego function   r= Internal world of the individual
T= task   R= Role

Because of the size and complexity of the task (running a large organisation)

headteachers must conceptualise a role big enough to manage it. This leads to a sense,

in the three cases discussed here, of identifying with the organisation as an extension

of themselves. As a result, unconscious material is passed from one aspect, as a

boundaried individual, to another, the system as a partial representation of their psyche.

By dint of their authority, heads are able to make significant changes to the systems and

structures of their school. As Figure 5 demonstrates, there cannot *not* be an unconscious

aspect to this and it will, in some way, mirror or replicate their own unconscious

preoccupations and patterns. What is remarkable in these accounts is that it is not a

pathological occurrence. Whatever the idiosyncrasies and specificities of these

individuals, with their human flaws and vulnerabilities, they are able to set up systems which work in the real world. Role, drawing upon their conscious and unconscious

Figure 5. Size and depth of task and projected material
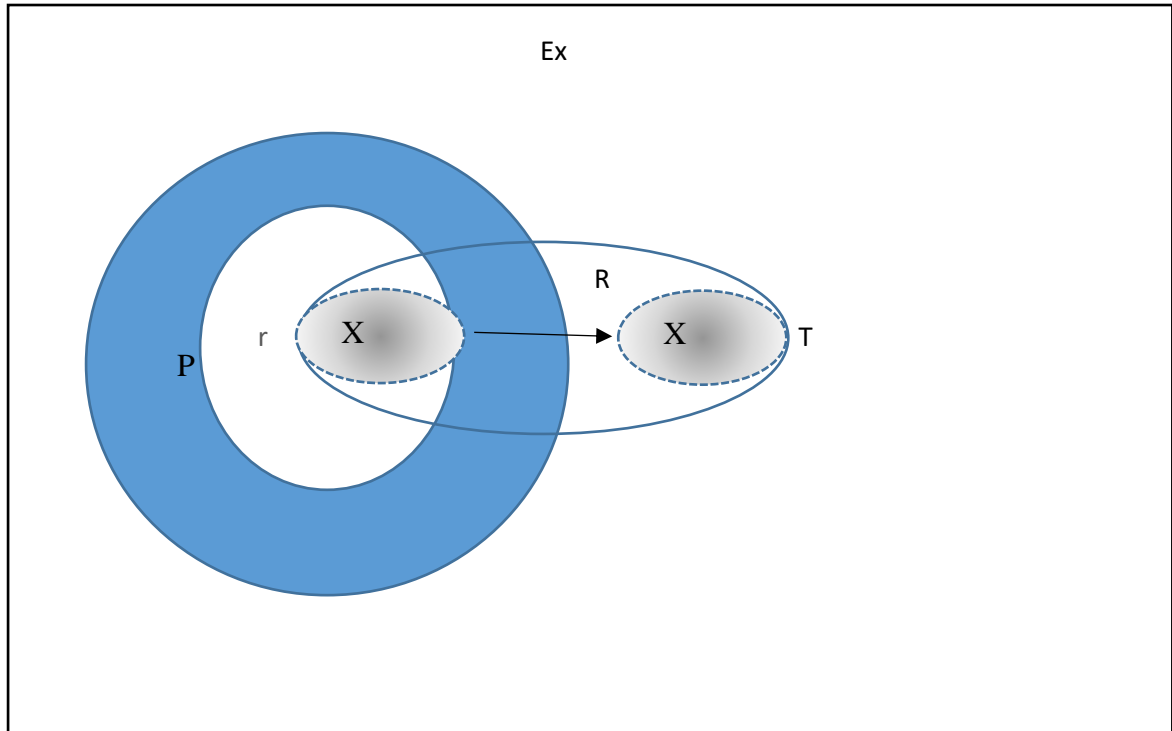
Ex=External environment of the individual
P = ego function   r= Internal world of the individual
T= task   R= Role
X→X = Projected unconscious material

resources, focuses these resources towards the task as they conceive it – consciously and unconsciously. What this study has also recognised is that it is the "shape" of their unconscious narratives that delineates how they frame current demands: Shelley creates a safe learning environment, Jim a benign environment in which to be noticed and Peter a "family" that calls him to action. The stories they tell and the structures they reveal are how they see the world, the school, the task.

<u>Containment</u>

Role is itself a form of boundary that constrains just how much of the self is "brought to work". It offers a form of containment. The role of headteacher, as a boundary function for the school, provides a level of containment for the school and those in it. It provides an "organisational holding environment" (Stapley, 2006), containing organisational anxieties, permitting tasks to be completed successfully. This is demonstrated vividly in Shelley's description of stifling a scream during the OFSTED visit because her SLT needed her to be in charge. In role as head it was necessary for her to remain engaged and thoughtful, containing her and their worries, so that the SLT could continue functioning, despite the stresses of the inspection.

In Bion's model (1963) of container/contained (♀♂), the more resilient the container the more stresses and other unprocessed material can be contained, made sense of and thought about. This holds true in any ♀♂ but headteachers, as leaders, have boundary-keeping of an entire system as a task. They do not contain just their own anxieties and uncertainties but must do so on behalf of the system-as-a-whole. Peter's vivid description of "taking every single hit" during the Ofsted inspection is a graphic example of this. Figure 6 demonstrates this.

Psychologically, symbolically, the head as boundary function is the skin of the organisation, making sense of and managing demands at the boundary and either rejecting or accepting them into the system, apportioning resources accordingly.

*Figure 6. Dual Containment at the boundary*

- - - = Headteacher
———= System

A question of this study has been what contains headteachers and this study has used a psychoanalysis to approach this, enabling it to consider unconscious factors.   It has shown that a significant way of managing the demands of the role is to locate potentially overwhelming emotions, related to work, in individuals or the system-as-a-whole. Shelley located vulnerability in students and her younger SLT. Jim used particular role holders to contain some of the emotion of the tasks associated with them.   Peter reworked a sense of past abandonment by providing for the school, "taking the hits" in a way that proved he was not his father.

In doing this, the three were able to take up a containing function and by looking after the other, look after parts of themselves. Looked at another way, the school-in-the-mind becomes a repository for the unconscious preoccupations of headteachers. Returning to the Rice drawing it is possible to re-conceptualise P and r in terms of the headteacher role and the organisation.   The head, at the boundary, acts as the organisational P and the school serves, partially at least as the Head's r. This symbiotic

relationship provides insight into organisational identification and organisational narcissism (Schwartz, 1987; 1990; Kets de Vries, 2006; Eloquin, 2016b). This is especially relevant for headteachers, given the amount of autonomy they possess (Monk, 2005)

Figure 7: representing relationship between headteacher as school's boundary and school as repository for aspects of headteacher's unconscious
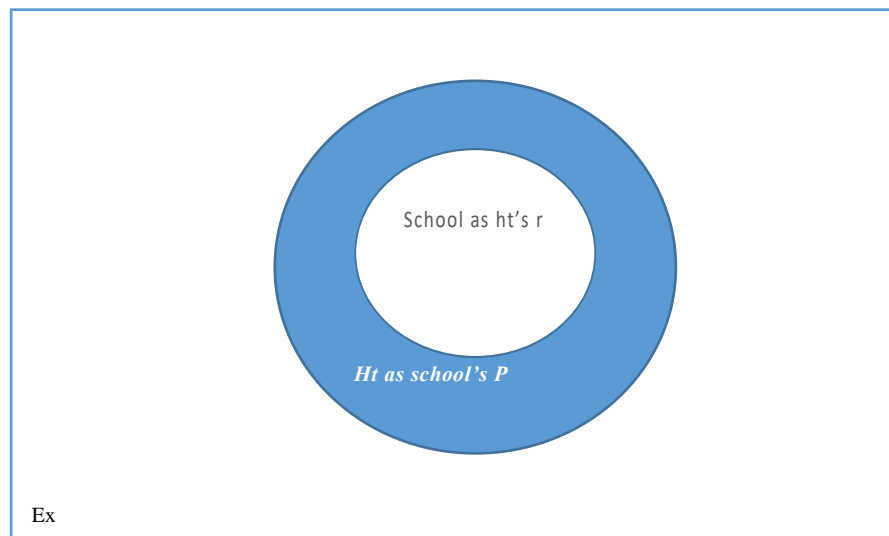
Ex= external environment of the school
P= head as "ego" boundary of the school
r= school as repository of head teacher's unconscious preoccupations.

By containing their schools, these headteachers contained projected parts of themselves within the school, freeing them up to attend to and make sense of the range of demands presented to them. And it is this act of making sense that leads to a final theoretical consideration: alpha unction.

Alpha Function

In contemplating the conceptual model of alpha function this discussion moves to a theoretical modelling of containment as applied to these three headteachers. It also

offers a formulation of why consultation and coaching by EPs, among others, could be effective. It is important to note that, as with Bion, this is a highly theoretical construct and it is intentionally abstract. As discussed in the literature review, beta elements are particles of unprocessed sense data that, passing through alpha function, are converted into alpha elements. This can be presented as:

$$\beta \rightarrow \alpha F \rightarrow \alpha$$

Head teachers, operating at the boundary, are conceived as αF for the school system: they make sense of the demands placed upon it and, in doing so, facilitate the functioning of the system, passing on tasks to the correctly authorised subsystem or individual within the school.

What this study has shown is that, as the role encompasses so much of the individual, including the unconscious, this functioning inevitably strains information through the unconscious of the individual: Jim can only make sense of things in the way Jim can make sense of things. One sees with the mind, not the eye. Using the αF model it is now possible to demonstrate how a leader comes to see things in terms of their own psychology. In each case alpha function is shaped by their own unconscious and the processed information, α, is made sense of through the mould of an individual's unconscious perceptual faculties. Therefore*:*

$$\beta \rightarrow \alpha F \rightarrow \alpha^j$$

Where ^{j} is the mind of Jim and αF^j denotes the specific way in which Jim might make sense of beta elements impinging upon him as the school boundary. Having thought about it thus, he can only entertain "Jim" shaped thoughts or solutions - α^j.

This model explains why the role and the demands of it are experienced differently by each participant. Demands, as beta elements, are sifted (or not) through the mind of the individual with his or her individual set of unconscious patterns and perceptions. While these three headteachers all operated well, the model can now describe why stress and burnout affect headteachers and why this then affects the functioning of the school. If $\beta > \alpha F^j$, then Jim will be overwhelmed, unable to make sense of the numerous demands presented to him.

This model also demonstrates , hypothetically, the effect of consultation, which EPs could provide for headteachers. By offering consultation, $(\alpha F^j + \alpha F^{EP})$, the EP increases the capacity to process beta elements. It also suggests that through exploration of the unconscious material observed in this study, an EP providing this capacity can free up attachment to unconscious material, leading to novel and creative ways of responding to β:

$$\beta \rightarrow (\alpha F^j {}_+ \alpha F^{EP}) \rightarrow 2\alpha^{jEP}$$

This is certainly something that could be researched further.

This section has discussed this study's central findings, making links to psychoanalytic theory and offering some conceptual advances in terms of how role can be seen as a containing function for role holders and for the system, and also how consultation can increase problem-solving ability for headteachers. This has implications for theoretical development, for headteachers and for EP practice, discussed next.

Strengths and Limitations of this study

This section will review strengths and limitations, considering epistemology, data capture and analysis, validity, reflexivity and generalisability

Epistemology

This study used a psychosocial study, predicated on a psychoanalytic epistemology asserting that individuals have a dynamic unconscious that influences behaviour in general and, here, how role is formulated and taken up. Techniques like free association and the use of transference and counter-transference are ways of exploring it.

Hinshelwood (2009) observes that psychoanalysis and education were once closely inter-twined but that this link has been weakened. However, there has been a resurgence of use of psychoanalytic theory by EPs in research (Clarke, 2015; Keaney, 2017) and practice (Pellegrini, 2010; Hulusi and Maggs, 2015; Bartle 2016; Eloquin, 2016a). Hollway and Jefferson (2013) explicitly identify psychoanalysis as a valid epistemology.

Viewing headteachers as defended subjects has permitted an exploration of their experiences in such a way as to reveal unconscious processes and defences in the face of the immense pressures they face. Additionally, viewing this researcher as a defended subject opens up new vistas of interpretation with regard to his own feelings, associations and –as will be considered – mistakes. The suggestion that "unconsciousnesses" are in dialogue illuminates the relationship between researcher and participant, but also shapes the nature of supervision, with a particular focus on the emotional experiences of the researcher, making links to the research focus and

material. This becomes grist for the research mill, requiring good understanding of psychoanalytic theory and different forms of reflexivity, with an accent of self-knowledge and the way in which the researcher's own unconscious will bring influence data capture and analysis. The reflexive note (see appendix 3) is an attempt to recognise an aspect of this.

Used as an epistemology, however, psychoanalysis is still subject to the same criticisms levelled against it as in the clinical setting.

Following clinical psychoanalysis, the inferences drawn from this study are rooted in individual case studies, considered a less "valid" form of methodology compared to the "gold standard of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) (Fox, 2003). Within psychology the dominant paradigm until the 1960s was a quantitative, positive position (Parker, 1995). The key evaluative criteria here are of verifiability and replicability: that if the same conditions prevailed a different experimenter would produce the same results. Using this criteria, most psychoanalytic research is considered to be poor quality evidence, by dint of its position in the research hierarchy.

However, a number of commentators have argued that, in psychology at least, the human capacity and need for meaning is not allowed for in quantitative approaches and new, approaches to research must be evaluated by different criteria (Parker, 1995). Fox, (2003) makes a similar case, highlighting that EPs do not comfortably operate from a positivist position but, rather, engage in constructivist or social constructionist joint meaning making. Psychoanalysis offers a unique insight into individual motivation and behaviour and is emancipatory in that it gives these individuals a new perspective on

their own experiences. This study did not intend to replicate quantitative research but rather sought to build on studies identifying the prevalence and nature of headteacher stress (Phillips et al, 2007). It has sought an exploration of depth, not breadth.

Data capture and analysis

This is a small scale study, with only three participants, something that prohibits extrapolation and wider generalisability. The small sample size, as stated, permits a depth of focus not possible with larger numbers. Furthermore, EP research has successfully used very small sample sizes recently (Clarke, 2015, Mullen, 2015).

There is an issue with sample selection, however.   The headteachers who replied to requests to participate were in charge of "good" or "outstanding" schools. Their schools and, by the lights of this study, their ego boundaries, were functioning well: they were managing the stresses and demands of the job. Headteachers in charge of failing schools or reporting overwhelming levels of stress did not reply and were not interviewed, so it is not possible to consider the conscious and unconscious strategies used by headteachers in such situations. This is an area of possible further study.

Two white British men and one woman of dual heritage were interviewed. Race and gender were recognised as factors but not focused on. Further studies might reveal how these play a role in headteacher identity formation. Shelley certainly was aware of bother ethnicity and gender in her comments.

This study used psychosocial research methods which are relatively new to EP research, although with notable successes (e.g., Reichardt, 2016; Keaney, 2017). The multi-

staged methodology used to analyse the data was complex, although similar to the application of the ORT in EP practice: the use of the ORT to reveal unconscious patterns and object relations, observation of behaviour and then discussion with participant/client to make sense of current behaviour with reference to the unconscious. It is a novel approach in research and could certainly be refined and developed further. The parsing of vignettes is a skill that requires time and thought and a good knowledge of psychoanalytic theory, as well as opportunities to reflect on selection and development of themes through supervision and reflective discussion. The amount of data accumulated is substantial and a clear, precise research question is important. It is easy to get lost.

The approach does yield extraordinarily rich and "deep" data which would not be obtainable by more traditional cognitive analytic approaches. The unconscious is by definition unknowable and any attempt to research it will need some leeway, acquiring a wealth of information from which, through the use of methods described, latent patterns emerge.

The research question

The focus of this study was the way in which the unconscious, accessed through biographical vignettes, influenced headteacher role conception as a mediating mechanism for managing the demands and stresses of being a headteacher. It was necessarily open-ended to allow for as full and detailed responses as possible, at the cost of having a more refined focus. There is research on the unconscious influence on organizational role (Newton, Long and Sievers, 2006) but only Tucker (2013) has explored the experiences of headteachers. This study, therefore, contributes to the field

of role analysis but also opens up new fields of enquiry for those working in education, including EPs. Upon reflection, the exploration of role alone would have been sufficient; the additional study of how this helps to mitigate stress has resulted in greater complexity at the cost of some clarity. A more focused research question exploring unconscious influences on role alone would certainly have been less stressful for the researcher. The wider research question did, however, produce very illuminating data into how headteachers unconsciously conceive of and engage with their organisations to manage pressures and this may not have come about otherwise.

Reflexivity

Considering qualitative research in general, Woolgar (1988) stated the disruptive risk posed by the methodological horrors of indexicality, inconcludability and reflexivity. Henwood and Pidgeon (1992), suggest that these horrors cannot be factored out and that good qualitative research should engage with them, something that actually strengthens the integrity of the research. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) discussing psychosocial research, emphasise the necessity of reflexivity linked to theory. This study has made use of psychoanalytic theory to analyse participant data. It has also made extensive use of reflexivity, to counter researcher bias and as an additional means of validating analysis: "using reflexivity in this way can serve both to guard against bad interpretations and assist with good ones (ibid, p.60).

In the first instance, reflecting on bias, a reflective note was written (Appendix 3) to surface less obvious motivations for the choice of this topic. Discussions with supervisors and psychoanalytically informed peers was essential in making links between the researcher's emotional state and the research material. It is recognised that

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the researcher is also a defended subject and that his own unconscious motivation could well influence data analysis. For example, in this study there is the strong possibility of a power imbalance, where the researcher has some insight into the inner world of a participant that they themselves lack. This could easily lead to feelings of superiority. As the reflexive note observes, an association when thinking about motivation for this research was an incident in which a headteacher was unfair to the researcher as a child. Such a feeling of power might redress this sense of powerlessness at an unconscious level, and in so doing would likely distort perception and analysis of the data. Recognising this does not prevent it but allows it to be considered. As Finlay (2003, p.108) observes, "without examining ourselves, we run the risk of letting our elucidated prejudices dominate our research".

A psychoanalytic epistemology goes further, proposing that these "various emotional responses – shock, confusion, surprise, a bodily reaction – provide an entry point into data analysis" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p.166) and that they can allow for "practical ways of noticing and using the researcher's emotional responses as a resource to produce valid knowledge" (ibid). Recognising the difficulties of assuming clinical psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic research are the same, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) suggest that transference and counter-transference, as described phenomena, can be "an important instrument of research into a patient's unconscious" (Jervis, 2009, citing Heimann, 1950, p. 81). In a research setting, making use of these "unconscious intersubjective dynamics" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p. 49) has allowed for certain themes to be triangulated and reflected on, giving an additional level of validity. An example from this study illustrates this.

During the biographical interview with Peter, the researcher suddenly offered an interpretation of Peter's career as a way of making peace with his father through his professional wanderings (unlike his father who just went off). The interpretation was not really accepted or followed up but what was most interesting was that the researcher had explicitly intended not to make such comments at all. The task was to ask open-ended questions and provide encouraging follow up comments to get full and detailed answers. In no other interview did such a thing happen and this was puzzling. Reviewing and discussing this, one hypothesis emerged that was congruent with the developing theme. This involved Peter and his relationship with his father: at an unconscious level the researcher had picked up on these tensions and without opportunity to process them, had acted on them – interpretation as a form of enactment. These were beta elements not yet made sense of. What alerted the researcher to this possibility, in reflection, was his own relationship with his father and a desire to find a career that was rewarding but that also met with paternal approval (this was also the case when thinking about Shelley's data).

This is an example of a level of analysis where the researcher's own unconscious anxieties intrude into the procedure. Money-Kyrle (1956), discussing "normal counter-transference" observes that "understanding fails whenever the patient corresponds too closely with some aspect of [the researcher] which he has not yet learned to understand" (1956, p.332). In summary, it can be argued that the intrusion of the researcher's unconscious processes and defences can be seen as a weakness of qualitative research in general and psychosocial research in particular. Attempts at eliminating these would neutralise and flatten the rich data acquired. By recognising and making use of

researcher subjectivities and reflecting on the meaning of these, however, adds to the meaning making procedure.

Generalisability

This is a small scale, ideographic study and care needs to be taken in extrapolating or generalising. This approach, however, has similarities with clinical psychoanalytic thinking, with much of the theoretical development arising out of single case studies. Clinical models of unconscious processes were derived from these and have been found to have a level of general applicability; for example Klein's description of paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions (1935; 1946). Kvale (1999) has also demonstrated the utility of both the psychoanalytic interview and case study approach in qualitative research. This study explored the lives and experiences of three headteachers and described, through the idea of the elaborated unconscious metaphor, an idiosyncratic model for each individual, exploring how unconscious patterns and preoccupations created a mental framework for conceiving of role and relation to organisation. It also suggested ways in which each person used, unconsciously, this framework to contain stresses, demands and anxieties related to their role. In deriving theoretical conclusions from their experiences about role, containment and alpha function, this study is following the tradition of clinical psychoanalysis. Further work is required but these ideas offer, at least, a set of heuristic tools for exploring the experiences of individuals in role. They also suggest ways in which to support and develop role holders by revealing to them some of their own unconscious motivations and templates.

The next section will consider theoretical and practical implications of this research.

Implications of Research

Theoretical implications

Any research endeavour is bound by what it is possible to know (ontology) and how it is known (epistemology). By drawing on new work from experimental philosophy, psychoanalysis and neurobiology, it has been possible to propose a quasi-realistic ontology, one that bridges critical realist and social constructivist positions. This was precipitated by the decision to use psychoanalysis as an explicit epistemology. It is argued that this study, by joining with other EPs (e.g. Clarke; 2015; Reichardt, 2016; Keaney, 2017), will provide a new impetus for EPs engaging in psychoanalytically-orientated research. This has exciting implications for the use of psychoanalysis as a tool for cultural enquiry, taking it beyond the clinic and thereby freeing it up for use by EPs in non-clinical ways and settings.

The study of the unconscious raises significant methodological questions and the use, here, of a multi-staged, multi-modal method, provides future researchers with a template for experimentation and opportunities for creativity. As research develops new methods emerge, freeing researchers from the need to emulate past procedures. Psychoanalytically inspired EP research can begin to develop its own particular approach, moving out from more classic qualitative methodologies for data capture and analysis.

This study contributes to the study of school functioning in its focus on headteachers. This is an under-researched area for EPs, although, historically, EPs have been engaged in system-wide research and intervention (Aubrey, 1988; Sutoris, 2000; Baxter, 2000). Demonstrating the link between a headteacher's unconscious inner world and the

school as a system, through role conception, highlights the critical importance of the leader's mind to organisational functioning and dysfunction (Eloquin, 2016b). There is a trickledown effect with implications for the well-being and performance of students and staff alike, the more traditional sphere of EP activity. Theoretically and practically, this research has implications for EP engagement with headteachers and senior leaders in schools, enabling a systemic impact on the school as a whole.

This study contributes to the already growing field of psychoanalytic EP literature, covering a diverse range of areas including: critical incidents in schools (Greenway (2005); family-school consultation (Pellegrini, 2010); organisational change (Clarke, 2015); teacher supervision (Hulusi and Maggs, 2015) and work with school leadership teams (Eloquin, 2016a).

It has also contributed to fields of study outside of Educational Psychology, specifically psychoanalytic organisational theory. It has contributed to the study of headship in its own right and as a subset of general leadership theory, making links with other leadership theorists such as Kets de Vries (2006). In exploring the unconscious aspects of role and how leaders use role and organisational boundaries as a form of containment which enables them to engage with often overwhelming pressures, it makes, it is hoped, a not insignificant contribution to theories around role and containment in organisations.

<u>Practical Implications</u>

<u>Feedback and ethics</u>

The study of the unconscious raises unique considerations in relation to feedback and ethics. The unconscious is that which is not known and this highlights the need for sensitivity in feeding back findings to participants. To date, Shelley and the researcher have met to discuss her data analysis and this was viewed as a positive and emancipatory encounter. But defended subjects defend for a reason and it is evident that a level of skill is required to ensure findings are presented in a manner that is helpful to participants and does not undermine their sense of themselves or their accomplishments. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) emphasise the importance of compassion in research of this nature and it has certainly been this researcher's experience that intimate insights into the inner world of these participants has triggered great compassion. These three individuals willingly recounted important moments from their lives and disclosed experiences that they had not talked about with anyone beyond an intimate circle. Proposing the existence of unconscious motivations, aspects of themselves they cannot yet see, needs to be done with the recognition that we are all the same: defended, vulnerable, flawed. When stated thus, it is hard not be feel compassion; for them, for the researcher and for *la condition humaine.*

<u>Coaching and development</u>

The exploration of how unconscious biographical factors influence the manner in which headteachers shape their roles, relate to their schools and manage the pressures of work highlights the importance of coaching and consultancy. The pressure on schools to perform is immense and such pressures inevitably work their way into the human nervous system, the only sentient part of an organisation. Activities such as executive

coaching and organisational role analysis are well recognised in the corporate world but less so in education. This research suggests the need for this in school settings is as necessary as anywhere and provides, following Tucker's (2013) research, a springboard for a more concerted and bespoke provision of such a service for headteachers.

Sensitising headteachers to the workings of their own unconscious and then working through these preoccupations through consultation or in a coaching relationship frees individuals from unhelpful unconscious imperatives. It also, as the discussion on alpha function indicates, increases their problem-solving repertoire. This study has demonstrated how individual unconscious patterns and preoccupations influence, in a highly personal manner, how headteachers construe their role and relate to the organisations they lead. Psychoanalytic theory has long established that defence mechanisms are deployed to manage strong and difficult emotions, including anxiety and stress. In their more extreme forms – the paranoid-schizoid position (Klein, 1946) – these often distort reality by projecting the source of the discomfort beyond the ego boundary into the world. Such short-term release poses considerable risk to more reasoned, longer term and systemic problem-solving and it is the latter with which headteachers are tasked to contend. An example of this (Eloquin, 2016b) was a headteacher who was so pressurised by an imminent OFSTED inspection and the threat of a downgraded rating that he began to respond to the school's issues in a way that was reminiscent of his own divorce. One move was to cut funding for the art and pottery department for no describable reason. Later it was discovered his ex-wife had been a potter!

This research proposes that EPs can provide a containing space, indeed act as a form of containment, which permits distressing and sometimes toxic emotions and thoughts to be thought about and processed. From this can then flow a more conscious awareness of the impact of stress on individual mind-brain systems. This could include current EP consultation skills, such as paraphrasing and active listening, as well as psychoeducation on the impact of stress on decision-making, relatedness and mental and physical health in general.

This is not just a benefit to them: by lowering defensive strategies, headteachers can be helped to maintain a more secure depressive position. This allows for a more considered, holistic vision of the school and its population. Students are not part-objects used as pieces to play out a headteacher's unconscious phantasy but whole human beings with needs and desires that can sometimes be lost in the drive for increased standards and progress (Eloquin, 2016c).

Implications for EP practice and plans for dissemination

This research exists at the boundary of EP practice and is influenced by psychoanalytic and systems-psychodynamic theory. It is, from one perspective, a departure from what might be considered more conventional EP practice in its consideration of headteachers. This view is open to challenge. Over twenty years ago Aubrey (1988) discussed organisational school psychology, noting that EPs could contribute at the systemic and strategic level, supporting schools and, as part of that, children with SEN. The 2000 DfEE report on "the current role, good practice and future direction of educational psychology services" also makes reference to the role EPs can play in informing policy in schools but acknowledges that "few schools reported having assistance from their

educational psychologists in bringing about organisational change" (DfEE, 2000, p.36). The report also observes that EP's offer consultation to headteachers and, more often, SENCos, but does not describe the content of these consultations. There is, then, a precedent for work with headteachers and senior leaders that, from examination of the literature, tends not to be taken up by EPs. This study is an attempt to influence this discourse and open up such ways of work as legitimate uses of an EP's time and energy.

At present, it seems that what is absent is the recognition that this work is needed and would be valued by schools and also that EPs are well-placed to offer it. Having been trained as an EP and as an organisational consultant, this researcher was struck by the overlap in skills, chiefly that of consultation, with the main difference being that of focus. To undertake such work, it may be that some additional skills need to be acquired, although it can be asked, why are EPs more comfortable offering consultation to parents, teachers and teaching assistants but not headteachers and senior leaders? One answer could be that the profession lacks a vision of this being a service within its more traditional SEN compass. Another, that it lacks the confidence to do so. Both these assumptions need to be challenged: "EPs, with their consultative skill-set, are well placed to offer consultation at this level, and to support head-teachers and leadership teams with the difficult task of managing a school" (Eloquin, 2016a, p.175).

In order for EPs to take up this type of activity additional skills and knowledge would be welcome, though not so much as might be supposed. The act of consultation is central to EP practice, regardless of its theoretical underpinning. Social constructionist, solution-orientated, systemic or psychodynamic psychological consultation involves listening to the concerns and problems of one or more other people and providing a

thinking space in which to jointly co-create new thoughts, ideas and solutions. Perhaps, then, the first step in moving to leadership focused consultation would be to provide an organisational framework that helps to locate organisational behaviour and concepts such as role within an organisational model or system. While this researcher has used a systems-psychodynamic framework, it is one of many theoretical perspectives that could be utilised (for greater elucidation, see Morgan, 1986, for example). Further consideration of role is also important and attendance at at least one Group Relations Conference would be a powerful way of introducing EPs to some of unconscious dynamics at play in any group or organisation. Experiential exploration of role, authority and leadership would also give EPs a practical (at times almost visceral) introduction to some of the emotional forces with which headteachers and others in leadership positions must engage.

In terms of existing training programs there are a number of organisational consultancy and development courses available. They are, however, often expensive and not tailored specifically to EPs or schools. This researcher has presented talks and training for EPs around systems-psychodynamics in the past and one possible next step might be the offer of a course on school based systems-psychodynamic consultation to headteachers and others, explicitly for EPs. This would ensure necessary knowledge and skills are introduced without the need for overlap or repetition of skills and knowledge EPs already have.

The practical implication - that EPs can support headteachers and the organisation - has added currency given the significant changes to education. The confused terrain of academies, free-schools and existing maintained schools suggests that any

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opportunities for education leaders to make sense would be welcome! Furthermore, with ongoing cuts to local authorities and more EPs, anecdotally at least, working independently, there is opportunity for the profession to demonstrate its usefulness to cash-strapped schools across a range of activities. The ability to work with heads and other leaders, to help, not just them, but the school as a whole in terms of well-being and progress is surely an attractive addition to the existing EP skill-set. It is also an exciting opportunity to serve schools and develop a wider theoretical literature on the psychological functioning of schools-as-systems and those who lead them.

To further this idea, dissemination of the key findings of this study are important. There are several relevant audiences: EPs, headteachers and education leaders, as well as organisational consultants and leadership coaches operating from a systems-psychodynamics perspective. It is envisaged that the findings will be discussed at conferences such as the one held annually by OPUS (an Organisation Promoting Understanding of Society). Talks to EPs and headteachers are already being envisaged, as is submission of an article based on this work to selected journals.

Conclusion

This study, undertaken by an EP for an educational psychology doctorate, takes the position that work with headteachers could and should be a legitimate area of engagement for educational psychologists. Headteachers are members of - and represent - the schools in which they and EPs work. And while the focus on leadership may require some additional training, the core skill of consultation, for leaders and for more traditional EP activities, is so similar as to be indistinguishable.

Working from a systems-psychodynamic perspective, it is argued that work with individuals in authority and boundary-keeping positions is, in itself, a systemic intervention. Headteachers allocate resources and define formal reporting relationships within their schools: they shape the school and the experience all those working within it, including the more typical sets of individuals and groups that EPs work with. These include teachers, teaching assistants and most importantly students, including students with SEN, as well as their families.

This study utilised a psychosocial framework and an explicitly psychoanalytic epistemology to explore the ways in which headteacher role-conception informs the relationship with the schools they lead and manages the stress of leading. It has demonstrated that unconscious processes, including projection and projective identification, play a central role in enabling headteachers to remain thoughtful and engaged at the boundary, facing multiple, often overwhelming, stressors. It is hoped that the use of this methodology and outlook will contribute to the growing body of literature chronicling EPs using psychoanalytic thinking in their practice.

In analysing headteacher accounts, it has been possible to identify the way in which individual experiences set the bedrock of an unconscious framework, shaping how headteachers conceive of their role and how it informs their relationships with their schools as psychological entities. This has been the explicitly psychoanalytic aspect of this study. Using the elaborated themes to "make sense", and discern patterns in how they construct the role of headteacher has provided an insight, limited as it is, into the way in which these three headteacher regulate and manage the stresses and demands of the role.

The central thrust of this study is that the individual unconscious plays a significant role in shaping the perception of the concerns headteachers must face, and how these concerns are perceived in the first place. This study paints a picture of an intimate, emotional and often unrecognised connection between the shaping experience of the ego in family and educational settings, the narrative form and perceptual template arising from these, and how headteachers then formulate and take up their roles. While headteachers all experience stress, how they experience it and the sense they make of it is coloured by the individual unconscious frame, the extended unconscious metaphor, which runs through their accounts of what it is like to be a headteacher.

In discussing these findings, the study makes links back to the construct of role as one that links the individual, consciously and unconsciously, to the organisation. In the case of headteachers this is complex and calls on resources rooted deep in the self, far below the surface of conscious awareness. The study further argues that the relationship with the school provides a form of dual containment in which the private and professional vulnerabilities of the headteacher are projected into the school system and individuals

within it, allowing them to better manage the job at hand: the container of the school is contained by the school. This permits them to remain thoughtfully engaged at the boundary, managing and making sense of a vast array of information, demands, requests – and stress.

In considering the limitations of this study, special attention is paid to the importance of researcher reflexivity. The practical and theoretical implications are also discussed, with attention paid to the role EPs can play in working with and supporting headteachers. As practitioner psychologists working in schools they have the knowledge and skills to support a group that is over-stressed and under-supported. In a changing professional landscape, this study argues that it is time to grasp this nettle.

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