University of Reading

Emotional Labour: The Perceptions and Experiences of Senior Leaders in Autism Specific Special Schools in England

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Abstract

This thesis explores the perceptions and experiences of emotional labour of a group of senior leaders in autism specific special schools in the south of England. Whilst there has been research on the impacts of emotional labour for teachers working in general Special Educational Needs (SEN) settings, previous studies have not dealt with the emotional labour of senior leaders in autism specialist schools. There is a recognised need, therefore, for this original research study which aims to examine emotional labour through the lens of senior leaders in a specialist provision.

Three schools participated in the study, with three senior leaders from each school being interviewed. An interpretivist approach was followed, which allowed for a more open and flexible approach exploring the diverse perceptions and experiences of participants. with individual interviews allowing for participant voices to be heard in this under researched area. Data analysis was inductive and iterative, following a thematic analysis method, with key themes identified from the data.

This is the first time that such a study has taken place, with the main findings indicating senior leaders in participant schools experienced ongoing daily emotional labour as a result of their interactions with a range of stakeholders, including students, staff, parents, governors and members of the local community. It appears that it is the ongoing nature of these relationships which has the greatest impact on participant senior leaders, with many reporting both physical and well-being effects from their interactions with stakeholders. The size of the schools, with their limited management structure is also a contributing factor, as the senior leaders reported being the first point of contact for stakeholders, with resultant impacts on their emotional labour. The distinct lack of continuing professional development and support was a further factor contributing to the high levels of emotional labour reported. However, participants had discovered a range of strategies to facilitate their day-to-day management of emotional labour, including physical exercise, surface and deep acting, and adopting a persona. An uplifting element reported by participants were a range of restorative factors which they posited compensated for the emotional labour engaged in, and these were mainly centred on student progression.

It is evidently clear from the findings that as a starting point, teacher professional development programmes incorporate the concept of emotional labour. These findings also provide a solid evidence base for those engaging in senior leadership roles in autism specific special schools or units attached to a mainstream school with a similar student cohort to the schools in this study, to undertake a robust continuing professional development and support programme. Finally, the provision of safe spaces or a forum where these senior leaders can talk openly using emotional labour concepts is recommended. The findings presented in this thesis add a unique element to our understanding of emotional labour in autism specialist provisions.

Declaration:

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The driver for this thesis came from a chance discussion with a colleague at a conference for school leaders of non-maintained and independent special schools and an initial review of the emotional labour literature. The colleague, who commented that "This is the hardest job I've ever done" had recently been appointed Headteacher of a small independent special school for children and young people with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. They were an experienced school leader, having worked in large mainstream schools and two generic special needs schools, one maintained by a local authority and the other an independent special school. Intrigued by this discussion, a more extensive literature review was undertaken to examine what research had been carried out on the emotional labour of school leaders in autism specific special schools. Surprisingly, although some articles were found regarding teachers' emotional labour when working with students with special educational needs, there was nothing on senior leaders of schools for students with autism.

As an experienced Headteacher of autism specific independent special schools who now fulfils an executive Headteacher role, I was intrigued as to why my colleague was voicing such an experience. Whilst this was one person's experience, it chimed with some of the comments that school leaders in other autism specific special schools had made in the past. This then prompted the question as to how the members of leadership teams in these special schools are prepared for their role, and whether the emotional load, or as Hochschild (1983) identified, emotional labour, was a key element that needed addressing. Hochschild defines emotional labour as '… the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage …'. (*sic*) (Hochschild, 1983 p 7). This concept has been expanded on by a number of authors including Beatty, (2000), Crawford, (2007, 2009) and Iszatt-White, (2009, 2016) and will be explored in greater depth in the literature review.

This empirical research study, conducted in southern England, explores the emotional labour undertaken by nine school leaders in three autism specific special schools, the preparation

received for this aspect of their role, and whether there were any mitigating factors which compensated for their emotional labour. The latter part of this research study coincided with the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, when students with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) were deemed as vulnerable by the UK government, thus prioritising their attendance at school. However, it is widely accepted that not all students with an EHCP attended school at this time, and headteachers of special needs schools were therefore dealing with complex situations where some students were attending school full-time which necessitated extensive Covid-19 safety systems to be implemented, whilst others were at home and required on-line educational support, alongside staff who were anxious about attending work. During this period, the complexity of the situation was recognised by the Chief Executive of the National Association of Non-maintained and Independent Special Schools (NASS) in an email communication to member schools:

> *I have always been struck by the potential isolation of leadership and the pandemic has increased the potential for leaders to feel alone…….. Now more than ever, we need space as leaders to be human beings who both do amazing things in supporting children, families and anxious staff teams and also have moments where they feel anxious or depleted themselves.* May 29th, 2020

This chapter will provide an overview of the research undertaken for this thesis and has the following sections: 1.2 Problem Statement; 1.3 Researcher Positionality; 1.4 Significance and Outcomes of the Study; 1.5 Research Questions; 1.6 Conceptual Framework; 1.7 Methodology; 1.8 Thesis Overview and 1.9 Conclusion

1.2 Problem Statement

Research has identified that there is a lack of research into special school leadership (Ashton-Smith, 2011; Scott and McNeish, 2013) with the studies that were available focused either on teachers or the head teacher rather than senior leadership teams. Further, there is a paucity of research regarding emotional labour, special education, autism and school leadership and this novel research aims to fill that void. Research focusing on primary leadership will be

included as many primary schools are of comparable size with similar management structures to generic special educational needs (SEN) and autism specific special schools.

This researcher posits that there is lack of continuing professional development and support for school leaders in special schools for children with autism where there is greater need for emotion management. This is recognised by Ashton Smith, (2011) who states that educating individuals with complex needs who struggle to effectively communicate and tolerate the presence of others (staff or peers), is stressful, demanding and challenging. Without ongoing support for senior leaders in autism specific special schools, there is the possibility that the high attrition rates reported by Scott and McNeish (2013) will continue.

Writing nearly twenty years ago, Beatty, (2000) stated that the missing link from the understanding of leadership emotion work was the leaders' voices, with Humphrey, Pollack and Hawver, (2008, p 152), highlighting the need for further study into 'emotional labor in managers' (*sic*). In this researcher's opinion, little has changed since those dates, and without the opportunity to hear the perspectives of senior leaders in autism specific special schools, it is difficult to construct and implement beneficial continuing professional support and development programmes to help address the high attrition rate of senior leaders in this field. This unique research study will go some way to filling that gap, giving voice to the leaders of autism specific special schools in this study.

1.2.1 School Leadership

There are many resources addressing preparation for school leadership, including the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers, (www.gov.uk/guidance/national-professional-qualification-for-headship-npqh) which is now the gold standard qualification for entering headship. However, there are some fundamental differences in leading special schools. Depending on the needs catered for, a range of professionals may be located on site, or be regular visitors to the school and, due to the smaller size of special schools generally, these professionals will liaise directly with members of the leadership team. Therapists, nursing staff, educational psychologists, clinical psychologists and other therapists have very

different professional accountability structures to teaching and support staff, with special school leaders needing to be conversant with the expectations of the overarching professional bodies of these staff. Parental contact with leaders in special schools is also more regular, and often, the first contact with a special school for a prospective student is through the parents. These initial contacts can take place up to 18 months prior to the student starting at the school, with regular contacts taking place until the student's start date. These contacts become more frequent and intense if the parent is challenging the local authority regarding school placement, and leaders in special schools are often asked to support parents at Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) hearings, which can create tensions with placing authorities who may regularly refer other young people for placements at the school.

Leaders of special schools therefore need to be emotionally resilient to manage the very differing needs of the diverse ranges of stakeholders that they encounter on a very regular basis. A number of researchers (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Beatty and Brew, 2004), have posited that the domain of leadership in education does not freely acknowledge the emotional challenges that school leaders face, and whilst their articles are over fifteen years old, in this researcher's experience, it remains the case. Further, the authors suggest that the affective domains of school leadership should be considered by researchers, including their emotional experiences, and this thesis directly addresses that issue.

1.2.2 Special Educational Needs

Whilst the government push for students with special educational needs is for them to be included in mainstream, it is acknowledged that the implementation of this differs both geographically and within local authorities, and that some special educational needs are better met in mainstream schools than others, (Frederickson, Osborne and Reed, 2004). Rather than true inclusion, many programmes are based on integration, with students being geographically located in mainstream but not fully included, (Barnard, Prior and Potter, 2000; Jordan and Powell, 1994). Students with an autism diagnosis are regarded as some of the most difficult individuals to include effectively in mainstream environments, and they are some of the most vulnerable to exclusion (Humphrey and Symes, 2013). Research suggests

that students with an autism diagnosis in mainstream may be socially excluded by their peers, are more likely to be bullied and are less likely to engage in co-operative work or interaction with their peers than those with other special educational needs (Humphrey and Symes, 2013; Symes and Humphrey, 2010). Even though inclusion remains a high priority in education, there is recognition that there are some young people for whom inclusion in a mainstream school is not the optimum choice to support their learning, wellbeing and progress, and a special school placement would be preferable. However, there is often disagreement amongst the key stakeholders, (local authorities, parents and mainstream schools) about when and if this move should take place, with a number of parents choosing to take their local authority to the SENDIST (https://www.gov.uk/courts-tribunals/first-tier-tribunal-special-educational-needs-and-disability) to challenge the placement named in the child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Special schools can either be maintained by their local authority, non-maintained, or independent, with the latter two categories being outside of local authority controls. Most special schools admit young people with an EHCP, which is issued and funded by their local authority. The SEND Code of Practice (2015)[1] identifies four main areas of need for individuals who are issued with an EHCP: Communication and Interaction (CI); Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH); Sensory & Physical (S&P); Cognition and Learning Difficulties (C&L). The Department for Education (DfE) requires special schools to identify the categories of students that they cater for from these four areas of need. Some schools will cater for more than one specific area of need and are commonly known as generic special schools, whilst other schools will have specialism and expertise in one area of need.

Autism falls under the category of Communication and Interaction as defined in the SEND Code of Practice (2015), and whilst many students may have co-morbid diagnoses, the primary need identified on their EHCP is most often their autism. This can cause disagreement between parties when the area of need is not the main focus of the school. In their research into inclusion, Barnard, Prior and Potter (2000) found that parents of children with an autism diagnosis were as dissatisfied with a mainstream education placement as they

[1] At the time of writing, the SEND Code of Practice is being updated

were with placement in a generic special school, due to the spiky profile that is often present in children with an autism spectrum diagnosis (ASD). This spiky profile means that whilst the individual may not have a learning disability, they may have significant gaps in their learning and understanding, usually related to their ability to access the curriculum. The authors also report that for parents of children with autism, their satisfaction with a mainstream placement decreases for secondary and Further Education establishments.

Whilst some maintained generic special schools cater for large numbers of students, sometimes as many as 250, it is unusual for autism specific non-maintained or independent special schools to be registered to take more than 100 students. Which School? For Special Needs 2017/2018 (Barnes) lists 17 autism specific special schools in the South East of England where this research project took place, with numbers of students attending ranging from 8 – 84. Smaller schools, by their nature, have a limited management structure, and the management teams of non-maintained and independent special schools often mirror those found in primary schools (Crawford, 2009). It is not unusual for the Deputy Head in smaller special schools to have a teaching commitment of 30-50% and in some schools, the Headteacher will also have a teaching commitment. Notwithstanding this, members of the leadership team in small schools may experience the emotional labour involved in human interaction more frequently than those in larger educational establishments (Crawford, 2009) as they are engaging directly with all stakeholders, and it is this engagement and the emotional labour involved that forms the foundation for this research. The concept of emotional labour was introduced by Hochschild, (1983) following her research of airline stewards, which found that there were expectations on an employee to suppress or elevate their emotions in order to present an acceptable persona to customers, and that emotional management was undertaken in exchange for a wage. The current novel study will explore the perceptions and experiences of the concept of emotional labour for senior leaders in participant schools.

1.2.3 Autism Specific Special Schools

Autism specific special schools, whilst retaining their own ethos and intervention specialisms, will have some elements in common. Routine, structure, graphic supports,

individual work spaces, in-depth knowledge of each individual student and the complexity of their diagnosis and co-production/close communication with parents are all identified by both the National Autistic Society (NAS, no date) and the Autism Education Trust in their Autism Competency Framework (2016), as requirements for best practice in such schools. It is recognised that each student with an autism diagnosis has a unique profile and with this, unique educational needs (Morrier, Hess and Heflin, 2011). It is this heterogeneity that can result in educators feeling deskilled, as what works for one student may not work for another, to the extent that what works for one student on one day may not work for the same student on the following day. When this happens, staff look to school leaders to support, advise and problem solve.

As noted in the previous section, non-maintained and independent special schools are often small establishments, with a limited number of staff in management positions. This is especially true of autism specific special schools, as the social communication difficulties of the students and their sensory differences (APA, no date; ICD-11, 2018; NAS, no date) indicate the need for a calm environment with lower student numbers. However, the smaller number does not indicate that there is a lighter workload for the management teams at these schools. It is generally the leadership teams of autism specific special schools who undertake the daily liaison with local authority personnel, on-site and peripatetic therapists, medical staff, parents and the local community, alongside the ongoing support that staff need to explore strategies to support young people with complex diagnoses. In their study exploring staff training in autism, Dillenburger et al., (2016, p 1) suggest that '…. people affected with autism generally tend to have higher support needs than other populations in terms of daily living, as well as their mental and physical health.'. It is recognised that teaching young people with autism can be a challenge, not only due to the complexity of their diagnoses but because teachers have '..no natural intuitive ways of understanding students with ASD.' (Jordan, 2008, p 13). Jordan further elucidates that the interactions between staff and students with an autism spectrum diagnosis are more laborious as they must be approached from a cognitive rather than an instinctive basis, resulting in exhaustion from working in an unnatural way.

An additional factor in autism specific special schools that can add complexity to the emotional labour undertaken by leadership teams is the strong genetic link in autism (Boucher, 2013; Warrier and Baron-Cohen, 2017), which Dillenburger et al., (2016) suggest may be as high as 50%. Holt and Monaco (2011) suggest that ASD is the most common inherited neuropsychiatric disorder and they go on to posit that the complex nature of autism spectrum disorders may point to ' … a continuous range of individually rare conditions' (p 445). Ghirardi et al., (2018) suggest that the genetic links are stronger for more cognitively able autistic individuals than for autism with intellectual disabilities, although there is little additional research to support this. However, this is an interesting point for the current study as all three schools in this research cater for more cognitively able autistic students. This genetic link is manifested in some parents who have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum whilst there may be other parents who may not have a formal diagnosis but demonstrate similar differences in social communication and interaction, and inflexible thought patterns. The result of this manifestation is that at any one time, it is highly likely that the leadership team will be communicating and interacting with parents who do not always communicate clearly and may struggle to see alternative viewpoints to theirs, having a binary thinking style. Additionally, parents with an autism spectrum disorder, like their children, can struggle to recognise and manage their emotions, potentially resulting in highly emotional communicative exchanges, which is explored in more depth in Chapter 2. Having given the context of autism specific special schools, the following section will explore the positionality of the researcher undertaking this study.

1.3 Researcher Context

The comment from a colleague at a conference referred to earlier in this chapter resonated with some anecdotal comments that had been reported to me from other colleagues. I reflected on my own experiences when I first became a member of the senior leadership team at an autism specific special school and remembered the emotional roller coaster that I and other colleagues on the team experienced. Prior to being appointed a senior leader at an autism specific special school I had worked at a generic special needs school and led a unit for children with autism attached to a mainstream school. Whilst I was prepared for the levels of support that the staff and students demanded, it was the emotional support required by stakeholders at the autism specific special school that was different from my previous

experiences where there was a dilution of the intensity due to diagnoses of the other students at each provision. It also seemed that at the autism specific school, the concentration of parents requiring ongoing emotional support was qualitatively different. Sometimes this support was in the form of listening, empathising and then signposting parents to other agencies that could help them during their time of crisis, and at others it required patience, resilience and levels of emotional labour that I had not previously encountered as the fragility of parent/school relationships was exposed by an off the cuff remark by a colleague or a forgotten coat.

Whilst these experiences were logged in my memory, it was the combination of the colleague's comment at a conference in parallel with the concept of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), which was discussed during the taught element of my Education Doctorate, that brought the memories flooding back. I read more widely about emotional labour as the concept resonated with my experiences with both books and journal articles being a source of further information and knowledge. Reflecting on my own lack of preparation in respect of emotional labour, colleagues confirmed that although this was a recognised component of the role by senior leaders in autism specific schools, no-one I contacted had received any guidance or preparation on the emotional demands of leading these schools. This was something that I felt needed exploring in more depth to ascertain whether there is a recognition that the emotional labour undertaken by leaders in autism specific schools should be included in their induction, so that they are better prepared for this element of the role.

Acknowledging the small sample size in this research study, the aim was to collect in-depth rich qualitative data which would enable a deeper understanding of participants' emotional labour. Semi-structured interviews were conducted which provided the foundation for discussions, whilst allowing an opportunity for participants to elucidate details of elements which facilitated their voice to be heard. To enable participants to reflect on the possible emotional labour undertaken with the range of stakeholders they may be in contact with, a visual prompt was devised.

1.4 Significance and Outcomes of the Study

Although there is a distinct lack of research on the emotional labour undertaken by senior leaders of autism special schools, a number of studies in America have explored the relationship between teacher burn out and teaching students with SEN and/or autism (see Brunsting, Sreckovic and Lane, 2014 for an overview of these). In their synthesis of research, Brunsting et al., (2014) state that one of the three elements strongly contributing to burnout is emotional exhaustion. It is posited that the stress experienced by teachers of autistic children is compounded by several factors including implementing Individual Education Plans, managing student behaviour and the demands of the teacher-parent relationship (Jennett, Harris and Mesibov, 2003). The authors go on to state that teachers of autistic students are 'especially at risk' of burnout (p 584) due to social communication challenges and inflexible thinking patterns. Corona, Christodulu and Rinaldi (2017) concur, highlighting the heterogenous nature of the students, the difficulties in relationship building between teachers and students and the interactions between parents and school staff which can often be challenging. They go on to state that whilst 'high rates of exhaustion, stress and burnout' (p 90) amongst generic special education teachers are linked with behaviours which challenge and the demands of the role, evidentially, those working with autistic students are at greater risk of burnout. This is borne out by the research undertaken by Blacher et al., (2014), whose results indicate that the relationships between teachers and autistic students are qualitatively different to those of neurotypical students or those with cognitive difficulties. These factors, this researcher opines, are compounded for senior leaders of autism specific special schools due to the contextual and environment factors raised earlier in this chapter.

The lack of training for the demands of working with autistic students is an issue that is still prevalent today, despite research undertaken 10 years ago highlighting this as an increasing need (Barnhill, Polloway and Sumutka, 2011; Scheuermann et al., 2003). It is recommended that the knowledge base for those working with autistic individuals should include not only a knowledge of ASD, but also strategies for teaching social and communication skills alongside finding solutions to behaviours which challenge. Scheuermann et al., (2003), highlight that there is no evidenced based research that recommends a curriculum model or intervention that is effective for students with ASD due to the heterogenous nature of that particular group and because their individual learning context can be different. This is a

challenge for leaders of autism specific special schools, because in this researcher's experience, both staff and parents are often looking for specific answers in these areas. Preparing and training staff to work with a more eclectic model can be thought provoking, as sometimes, leaders may have to admit that they do not always have the answer, which can leave both staff and parents feeling frustrated, with this frustration then leading to emotionally charged interactions. Research into teacher self-efficacy and burnout, has identified the strong correlation between teacher self-efficacy and their relations with parents, indicating that lack of trust, parental criticism, or a lack of co-operation from parents reduces teachers' estimation of their professional competency and impacts on emotional exhaustion. Whilst recognising the importance of the school/parent relationship, the amounts of time involved in fostering and maintaining this can be time consuming, adding to teacher workload (Busby et al., 2012; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010). In communication with colleagues leading autism specific special schools, it has been discovered that these parental challenges come directly to the school leaders and it is they who may experience self-doubt not only in their professional competency but also in the emotions aligned to this, and this research project aims to explore the issue in more depth.

This thesis provides a valuable addition to emotional labour research, filling a void between emotional labour and the senior leadership of autism specific special schools. The study will suggest recommendations for the continuing professional development and ongoing support for senior leaders of such schools, with the aim of reducing the attrition rate of these leaders, (Scott and McNeish, 2013). It is it suggested that this attrition rate is impacted by the emotional labour senior leaders engage in daily. However, any actions resulting from this research should be approached sensitively, as there may be a correlation between the complexity of student diagnosis and the emotional labour experiences of participant senior leaders.

1.5 Research Questions

The focus of this thesis on the emotional labour of leadership teams in autism specific special schools led to several possible areas of exploration. The starting point was to ascertain the emotional experiences of senior leadership teams in participant schools and their perceptions

as to whether these were different to previous experiences they may have had as members of leadership teams in other educational environments, leading to the initial research question:

RQ1 What are the experiences and perceptions of emotional labour for school leaders working in autism specific special schools?

The next stage was to explore whether the context and environment of these schools presented unique challenges for participant school leaders:

RQ2 What contextual and environmental factors in an autism specific special school further impact on school leaders' emotional labour?

With the parent/school relationship being key in the education of children with autism, the ongoing staff development, training and support required to keep up to date with the latest research in autism, and the increasing complexity and mental health needs of the young people being referred to autism specific special schools, aligned with the potential impact of these factors on participants, the final research question was:

RQ3 What strategies do leaders of autism specific special schools employ for the management of their emotional labour and how do they build emotional resilience?

1.6 Conceptual Framework

Several theoretical concepts were explored during this interpretivist study, primarily emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), social constructionism, (Burr, 2003) and some aspects of Marx's alienation theory (1965). Interweaving with these is Goffman's presentation of self (1959), and whilst these concepts will be discussed in greater depth in the literature review, it is pertinent to outline them at this point.

The social constructions of leadership can be many and varied, particularly in a special school environment where there are a greater range of stakeholders for leaders to interact with. These social constructions may be the foundation upon which participant school leaders' psychological and emotional wellbeing are formed. The impact of these constructions will be explored during the research as there is the possibility that the nature of these may influence the participants' sense of self, with potentially resultant alienation, impaired well-being and burnout. The most prominent theory of alienation is attributed to Karl Marx, (1976) with Hochschild (1983) incorporating some elements of his theory into her concept of emotional labour. This alignment has been criticised by some, (Bolton, 2005; Bolton and Boyd, 2003), who suggest that Hochschild has selected only two of the four elements of alienation identified by Marx. The elements selected by Hochschild are product alienation and labour process alienation with the former relating to the one-sided nature of investing in one's role, which is only recognised by the wage received, and the latter to the lack of control over work organisation and working conditions, and the subsequent impact on one's health. The criticism is that the remaining two elements, human nature alienation and fellow being's alienation/commodity fetishism have been neglected, and this argument will be analysed in the literature review. The current study will explore the conceptual links between social constructions of leadership where a range of stakeholders may hold varying expectations of participant leaders, which may impact on their emotional labour with the potential for resultant role alienation. The methodology employed to explore these concepts is described below.

1.7 Methodology

To answer the questions raised above, an interpretivist lens was adopted, engaging a social constructionist approach, (Burr, 2003), as the researcher wanted to explore the social constructs that various stakeholders may have with participant leaders, the frequency of these and whether there was an impact on the individual school leader's emotional labour. With the range of stakeholders involved in these specific educational establishments there was the possibility that the social constructs of leadership varied between each stakeholder group alongside the individual participant's constructs of leadership. Three autism specific special schools in the South East of England agreed to take part in the research. Individual interviews were undertaken with nine participants, three from each of the three participant

schools, (one participant had left one of the schools a month prior to their interview), who were all members of the leadership team at one of these schools. These interviews were recorded and transcribed, prior to data analysis taking place. Data was coded using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2018, 2019a), which incorporates an iterative inductive approach and will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3. The conceptual framework for this thesis is shown in Figure 1.1 on page 23.

1.8 Structure of Thesis

The research questions noted in Section 1.5 of this chapter led to a review of the emotional labour literature, especially where linked to educational roles and an exploration of research on resilience, which is detailed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology employed in conducting this empirical study to explore the impact of emotional labour on leaders of autism specific special schools. The results of this research are detailed in the subsequent three chapters, (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), with each chapter reporting a key theme from the data analysis. Chapter 4 details participant responses relating to the first research question regarding the perceptions of emotional labour. Chapter 5 examines the contextual and environmental factors which participants suggest impact on their emotional labour, with Chapter 6 exploring the self-management and resilience building strategies which participants found to be beneficial. A discussion on these results follows in Chapter 7, with a concluding chapter, Chapter 8, exploring the implications and recommendations from this research.

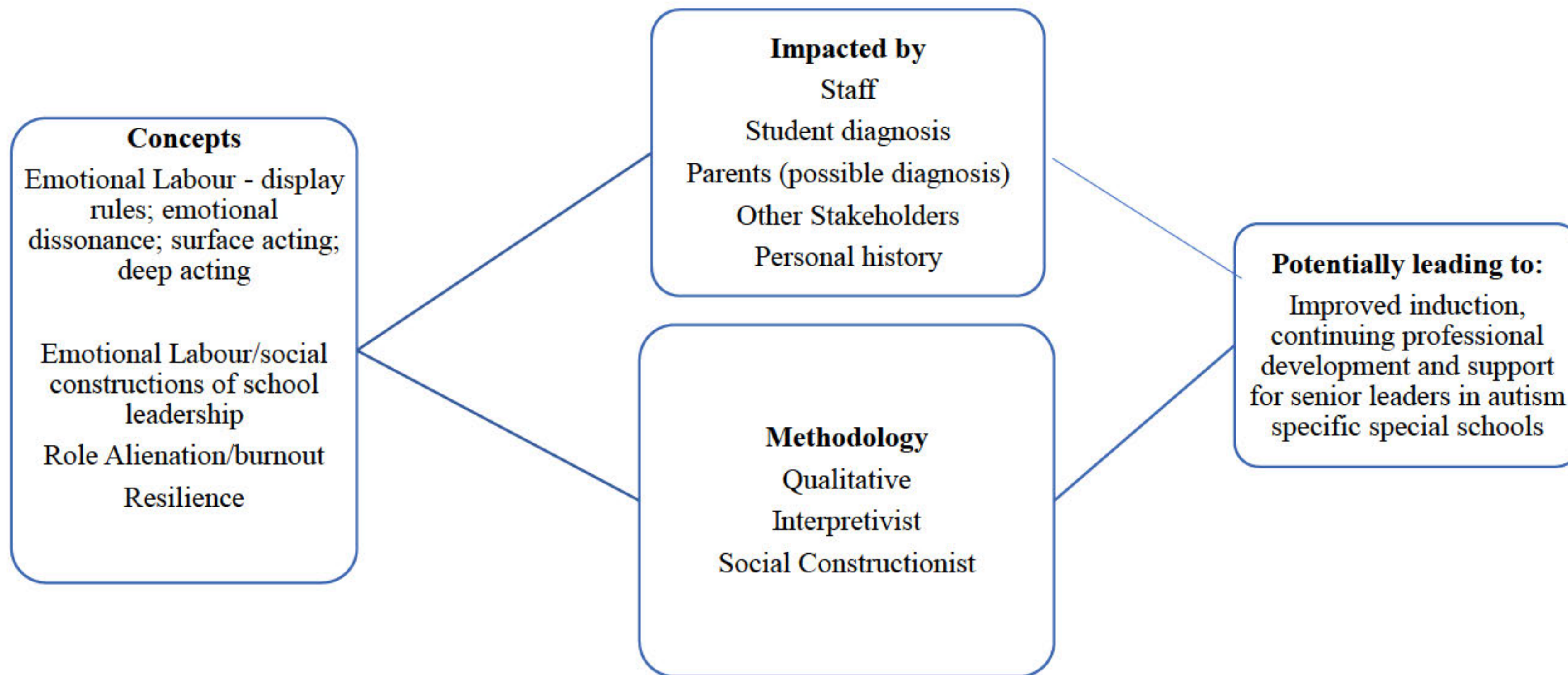

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

1.9 Conclusion

This innovative research exploring the emotional labour of senior leaders in autism specific special schools contributes to the work on school leadership and emotional labour, giving the participants a voice to talk about their experiences and the strategies that they employ to ameliorate for the emotion work undertaken. The results of this project will incorporate recommendations regarding policy on staff recruitment and induction to ensure that staff being employed in schools such as those in this research are better prepared for the range of stakeholders that they will come into contact with and the subsequent emotional management that may be required, and as a consequence of this, staff retention in this sector may be improved. There may also be wider implications for initial teacher training and the recognition of emotional labour as a result of this novel research project.

The following chapter explores and critically analyses the literature regarding emotional labour and emotional resilience, alongside information on the diagnostic criteria for individuals with autism and will identify how scant the research is regarding the emotional labour of school leaders in autism specific special schools, a gap that this unique research will fill.

2 Literature Review

‘Schools are powerhouses of emotion…..’ (Harris, 2007, p 14).

2.1 Introduction

The interaction between leadership and emotion is complex and terms are not clearly defined. Lupton, writing in 1998 stated that there was a ‘certain lack of clarity and conceptual confusion in the literature.’ (p 15). Therefore, to provide a focus for this literature review, an overview of the available literature on school leadership linked to emotion will be presented, with a focus on leadership of schools for students with SEN and leadership of autism specific schools. A search on the University of Reading’s Summon service on 27th July 2019 using the terms “emotional labour”, “school leadership”, “special education”, “special educational needs”, “SEN” and “autism” in varying combinations resulted in 442 results for “emotional labour” and “SEN” combined, whereas the combination of “emotional labour” and “school leadership” and “autism” resulted in 2 journal articles and one thesis, none of which had relevance to the current research. A similar search combining the phrases “emotional labour”, “special education” and “teachers”, and “emotional labour”, “autism” and “teachers” resulted in 251 results and 90 results respectively. The same searches were conducted at regular intervals throughout this research, but there were no studies relating to emotional labour and senior leaders in autism specific special schools.

Mackenzie’s empirical qualitative research (2012), using semi-structured interviews with a total of 23 Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinators, teachers and teaching assistants, explored the emotional work and emotional labour of staff working with young people with special educational needs and found that respondents were deeply emotionally attached to their work. However, it is reported by Rae, Cowell and Field (2017) in their empirical study of 8 teachers that the perceptions of these individuals working with students with behavioural difficulties ‘…. were affected by limited preparation during their initial training of the role of emotions played in education and behaviour management.’ (p 204). The author of the current study posits that similar issues will be identified with the leaders of participant autism specific schools.

The research will begin with an examination of the available literature, supporting the development of a thematic structure within which to conduct the current study and provide reflective opportunities in keeping with the iterative analysis of results. This literature review will commence in Section 2.2 with a definition of emotion in respect of the current research project before exploring the culture of autism and the differences experienced by autistic individuals. A review of emotion work and the conceptual development of emotional labour will follow, in Section 2.3 including the work of Hochschild (1983) where she examines the ideas of emotional dissonance, gift exchange and display rules. Links between emotional labour and Marx's alienation theory (1976) will be analysed in Section 2.4 followed by consideration of school leadership and emotion in Section 2.5. There will be a review of the concept of resilience and how this may impact on emotional labour and the emotion work undertaken in autism specific special schools in Section 2.6, with the chapter conclusion in Section 2.7

2.2 Definition of emotion

Before researching the emotional labour literature, it is pertinent at this point to define emotion in the context of this study. This is a challenging task. LeDoux, (1998, p 48), posits that 'Emotions, in short, result from the cognitive interpretation of situations', and this researcher concurs with that suggestion, acknowledging that whilst not always being rational emotions, have a role to play in our social lives (Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, 2006). All humans experience emotions, and experiencing emotions is an inherent element of social interaction, whether this is face to face interaction or an imagined interaction. Denzin refers to those that we interact with as 'emotional associates' (Denzin, 2017, p 3), and further posits that emotions cannot be experienced without the presence of an emotional associate, whether this is imagined or implicit. However, our understanding of our own emotions differs from those of other people (Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, 2006,), and it is the sense made of an experience that defines it emotionality, whilst for some, the mental images that they have of an interaction are so strong that emotions experienced seem real and may include the physiological changes associated with that emotion. 'It must be granted that emotion is a social, interactional, linguistic, and physiological process that draws its resources from the human body, from human consciousness, and from the world that surrounds the person.', (Denzin, 2017, p 31). However, despite these physiological changes, not all individuals are

able to recognise and manage the corresponding emotions and this will be explored in the following section where an outline of the challenges of individuals with autism are detailed.

2.3 The culture of autism

There is an ongoing debate regarding the terminology used for individuals who have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum which is discussed in depth by Kenny et al., (2016) who conducted an on-line survey resulting in 3,470 responses. Whilst their conclusion is that there is no preferred terminology, for the purposes of this research, the term 'autistic' will be used rather than 'on the autism spectrum'. Autistic adults refer to the 'culture' of autism (Feinstein, 2019) when describing the perspective that they have on the world, which derives from the recognised difficulties that autistic individuals experience, namely social communication and interaction and inflexible patterns of thinking, (Attwood, 2006; Baron-Cohen, 2008; Boucher, 2013). The former of these impacts on the autistic individual's ability to read body language and facial gesture, to understand sarcasm and idioms, and to understand the social structures regarding communication. Rigid thinking styles leave the individual unable to look at alternative courses of actions which in some cases, can lead to behaviours that challenge. Alongside these difficulties are the psychological theories related to autism; executive functioning, theory of mind and central coherence theory, (Attwood, 2006; Baron-Cohen, 2008; Boucher, 2013).

Whilst not a central theme of this research, it is apposite at this point to briefly explain these theories. Executive functioning encompasses the ability to plan and carry out a particular action, from having a shower to completing a piece of academic work. Theory of mind allows an individual to think about what another person may be thinking and to appreciate that they may have an alternative viewpoint. Finally, central coherence theory allows a person to see the 'bigger picture' in a given situation, for example if a speaker is taking an assembly, neurotypical students know not to walk directly in front of them and talk to a friend because they have recognised the scenario from previous occasions and registered that the students are all facing the front and listening to the speaker, whilst a student with autism may not read or understand these signals. With strong heritability related to autism, (Warrier and Baron-Cohen, 2017), those working in autism specific special schools are not only

working with students who experience these difficulties, but potentially with some parents who may also be on the autism spectrum.

The inability to recognise and manage one's emotions, alexithymia, is increasingly recognised as a key difference in those with autism (Gaigg, Cornell and Bird, 2016; Gaigg, Crawford and Cottell, 2018; Ziermans et al., 2018). In his recent book exploring work opportunities for adults with autism, Feinstein (2019) gives the example of an adult female who states, 'My impulse and emotional control are that of a very small child', (p 264), even though this adult has above average IQ. Below is the wording from an Education, Health and Care Plan for a student at one of the schools participating in this research, which refers to his emotions and his management of them:

> They are very extreme and can change in an instant. He can be exceptionally happy, extremely excited (and therefore can't focus), very worried or incredibly angry. There is often not a warning sign when his emotion moves to anger, and it is very hard to calm him when he is in this state.

It is the need to establish clear boundaries and remain objective whilst supporting students to gain the skills and knowledge required for them to be able to manage their own emotions and regulate them, that can be such a challenge to staff working with students with autism. The requirement to empathise with students who struggle to recognise and express their emotions in a socially acceptable manner can leave staff feeling emotionally drained. Additionally, due to the sensory and perceptual experiences of autistic students, they may present with behaviour that challenges and often staff find that they lack some of the characteristics detailed by Ashton Smith (2011), whose empirical research involved 38 senior professionals across six schools. Following a meta-analysis of the links between anxiety in autism and cognitive functioning by Mingins et al., (2020) there is an indication that more cognitively able individuals with autism experience higher levels of anxiety than those with less cognitive ability, and this may impact on the understanding and expectations of staff when working with students. The staff, in turn, look to school leaders to support both the students and them when their own emotional management suffers, and this further adds to the

emotional labour required by the leaders. Beatty, (2000) describes the rationality and emotional control that is required by mainstream school leaders to present as professionals, going so far as to say: 'Leaders' work seems well described as emotional management of self and others, involving significant amounts of emotional labour.' (p 340). This researcher posits that this requirement is greater for leaders in autism specific special schools and therefore suggests that emotional labour may provide a conceptual framework to facilitate understanding of the unique emotional dimension of their role.

When conducting research with headteachers working in primary schools, Crawford, (2009), suggests that they become a conduit for the emotions of others, as the age of the pupils results in frequent emotional episodes. She further suggests that primary school heads can feel more vulnerable as a result of this and an initial suggestion for this research is that due to the emotional difficulties experienced by students with an autism diagnosis, senior leaders in autism specific special schools feel similar vulnerability to those described by Crawford, and this frames the first research question:

RQ1 What are the experiences and perceptions of emotional labour for school leaders working in autism specific special schools?

On considering this phenomenon, Hochschild's seminal work, (1983), on emotional labour describes a number of concepts which may resonate with research participants: emotional dissonance, feeling rules and gift exchange. This research will fill a gap in the current literature when considering the emotional management that leadership teams working in autism specific special schools undertake.

2.4 Emotion work

What we know about emotional labour comes from a range of resources, but the work of Arlie Hochschild, (1983), whose empirical study focusing on airline attendants in America, brought this concept to a wider audience. Hochschild highlighted the requirement of employees to engage in 'emotion work', which she describes as the process of changing or

managing one's emotions in line with the appropriate expectations of the employer. She refers to these expectations as display rules or feeling rules which have a societal foundation, such as the respect for hierarchy within an organisation, not laughing at funerals and being happy at weddings. Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, (2006, p 68), highlight that these display rules can vary across cultures, with some cultures lacking emotional expression as it is deemed inappropriate. A pertinent point made by Lupton, (1998), is that whilst expressions of emotion may differ across cultures, the physiological response to emotional states are universal but the contextual interpretations vary.

Hochschild further identified three types of emotion which one may engage during employment: the cognitive mode, where the employee attempts to change their thoughts and the associated feelings; the physical/emotional link, where an employee may take deep breaths before engaging in a possible confrontational situation and changing one's outward gestures of expression to effect change on one's inner emotions such as attempting to smile when not feeling happy. The terms surface and deep acting were adopted to describe how individuals manage their emotions to meet the feeling rules of their employer. The former refers to when an individual puts on a superficial display of emotion to the emotional associate, and the latter, where one consciously adapts one's feelings and thoughts so that the expected emotion is not only displayed but experienced, similar to method acting, (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000; Humphrey, 2012). The term display rules has been adopted by a few authors to better describe organisational expectations as feeling rules are difficult to monitor, (Humphrey, 2012; Humphrey, Ashforth and Diefendorff, 2015). An observer cannot truly know what an actor is feeling, whereas the monitoring of display rules is an easier task, and it is when these display rules are broken that the actor concerned is deemed by others to be deviant in some way (Lupton, 1998).

A third term associated with display rules is the expression of spontaneous, genuine emotion, (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Humphrey, Pollack and Hawver, 2008; Humphrey, 2012; Humphrey, Ashforth and Diefendorff, 2015). These authors argue that this comes under the emotional labour banner as a display of genuine emotion may meet the proscribed display rules of an organisation. However, this third term will not be included in the current research as the aim is to discover the conscious management of emotions for school leaders in autism

specific special schools, rather than a genuine emotional display which may meet organisational display rules.

A review of the theoretical perspectives of emotional labour by Grandy and Gabriel, (2015), highlights three distinct components: emotional requirements, emotional regulation and emotional performance. Each of these elements, they posit, have been researched and measured separately. However, the term emotional requirements aligns closely to display rules, emotional regulation to surface and deep acting and emotional performance to the actor's expressions as observed. Despite this more recent categorisation, Hochschild's original terms are more commonly found in the literature relating to emotional labour and will therefore be used in the current study.

Further exploration of the concept of emotional labour questions the differences between the requirements of the airline attendants that were the subject of Hochschild's initial work, the emotion work that individuals perceive to be required within their professional role, and the emotion work that one engages in during normal social interactions such as the white lie told to avoid hurting another's feelings, (Bolton, 2005; Bolton and Boyd, 2003). The suggestion is that those who engage in emotional labour for an employer often move between these three modes and are therefore 'skilled emotional managers', (Bolton and Boyd, 2003 p 289). This idea of a skilled emotional manager allows a differentiation between the emotional labour undertaken by an employee and the emotional management an individual undertakes in day to day life. To further support this notion, Bolton, (2005), suggested four domains of emotional management within the workplace:

- pecuniary – closely correlating to the emotional labour described by Hochschild
- presentational – Hochschild's 'emotion work', (1983), and Goffman's, (1959), 'presentation of self'
- prescriptive – the following of display rules within an organisation
- philanthropic – giving an extra something during a social interaction at work

These domains are encompassed under the term emotional management, incorporating Hochschild's original concept, with Bolton arguing that this better describes the emotion work that individuals undertake in the workplace. This conceptual debate is explored further by Iszatt-White, (2016, p 5), who concludes that there is value in the synthesis of knowledge and extending the emotional labour construct to include new areas. She suggests that the use of the term 'emotional labour' in favour of the term 'emotion management', which she suggests is more appropriate, is a 'forgivable sin', (p 5), whilst Grandey and Gabriel state that there are 'fuzzy construct conceptualizations', (2015, p 21). For Hochschild there is a clear differentiation between emotional labour, emotion work or emotion management. The term emotional labour refers to the relationship between the management of emotion and the associated wage, whereas emotion work or emotion management, she posits, are the work undertaken in private for a '*use value*' (*sic),* (Hochschild, 1983, p 7). There is further construct confusion by Harris, (2002), who suggests private and public domains for emotional labour with the former being interactions with work colleagues and the latter the outward facing presentation engaged by professionals which is a deviation from Hochschild's original concept of private and public, being respectively home/family and work. However, despite the semantic differences there is consensus regarding the adoption of a multitude of roles by professionals which is dependent on the expectations of their audience with a resultant possible distancing from their own emotions, (Harris, 2002), and this aspect of emotional distancing will be explored during this research.

In their review of emotional epistemologies exploring the relationships between teachers and school leaders in Australia amongst two cohorts of 53 students, Beatty and Brew (2004), present a framework of emotional progression, which is summarised below:

- Emotional silence – where emotions are ignored or suppressed
- Emotional absolutism – refers to the feeling rules of organisations and the definition of emotions as right or wrong
- Transitional emotional relativism – where emotions are acknowledged but responses to them suppressed
- Resilient emotional relativism – where emotions are acknowledged and displayed openly

There are a number of correlations between the above framework and the original definitions described by Hochschild, (1983) and, having considered these arguments, the term emotional labour will be used in this research when referring to the work that the participant school leaders undertake in managing their emotions. The researcher is of the view that the discourse of emotional labour will be better understood by participants than that of Beatty and Brew (2004) or Bolton (2005).

2.4.1 Emotional Labour and Alienation

Before elucidating further on Hochschild's emotional labour, it is apposite to acknowledge that a number of authors have critiqued her work and the links made with Marx's alienation theory, (1976) offering alternative concepts of the emotions of the workplace (Bolton, 2005: Lynch, 2007; McClure and Murphy, 2007). It is suggested that the clear distinctions Hochschild makes between emotional labour and emotional management discussed in the previous paragraphs result in emotional labour being a one-dimensional concept (Brook, 2009b). The managerial control exerted over workers' emotions is also queried, as there may be commonality of experiences between workers resulting in collective resistance to the factors impacting emotional labour (Brook, Koch and Wittel, 2013). However, Brook (2009b, p539), refutes these critics, stating that the concept of emotional labour is 'applicable to all forms of waged-labour involving a degree of emotion work.'.

Marx's alienation theory (1976) is based on the premise that the majority of individuals work for a wage to meet their physical needs with the ruling classes owning and controlling the production methods. It is the concept of waged labour that provides the link between emotional labour and commodification of emotions when employees are engaged in supporting customers/clients which may subsequently lead to alienation. Marx detailed four aspects of worker alienation (Brook, 2009a; Mastracci and Adams, 2018; Musto, 2010):

- Alienation from the product of an individual's labour, which refers to the objectification of the product for which the labourer receives a wage. Hochschild relates this product to the emotional requirements of a specific role which is dictated by the employer

- Alienation from the process of production, which relates to the lack of control that an employee has over their work organisation and process
- Alienation from their own creative being, where commodities dominate one's life and consumerism is prevalent
- Alienation of individuals from each other, where capitalism has supressed the potential for collective transformation

He further suggests that in a capitalist society these elements of alienation can lead to psychological and physical impairment. Hochschild (1983) makes explicit links to the first two of these elements with an individual's emotional labour viewed as the product and the organisational expectations regarding emotional displays as the labour process. Although implying the latter two, she does not make the link between these and their impact on an individual's self-knowledge, social relationships and world knowledge, restricting the alienation to the workplace and its social relationships, (Brook, 2009a). More recently, alienation theory has been expanded to incorporate a more general model (Silver, 2018) and there is an assertion that adhering to an organisation's display rules is at the basis for the process of alienation of self (Mastracci and Adams, 2018). As part of this generalisation of alienation theory, Hochschild suggests that the performance of emotional labour can impact an individual in the same way that Marx proposed mental and physical labour do. She purports that by engaging in emotional labour '…. The worker can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self …' (Hochschild, 1983, p 7) and that their emotions may become commodified when an element of their role involves uneven social interactions which may include elevated emotional exchanges.

2.4.2 Emotional Dissonance

Hochschild (1983, p 90) introduces the term emotive dissonance to explain the maintenance of 'feeling and feigning'. She asserts that stress occurs as a result of this dissonance, which is described as the need to display emotions as expected rather than emotions as felt and is associated with surface acting. As Grandey and Gabriel (2015) state, surface acting may meet the goal immediately, but deep acting may ameliorate the dissonance, with the latter determined by higher order goals such as work motivation and personal values. There may

be resultant ill health from surface acting as emotional dissonance can lead to the loss of an individual's emotional regulation and subsequent psychological and physical health issues (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000; Beatty, 2000; Zapf, 2002; Crawford, 2007; Humphrey, 2012; Humphrey, Ashforth and Diefendorff, 2015; Grandey and Gabriel, 2015; Maxwell and Riley, 2017). Further, the association between emotional dissonance and organisational alienation is recognised by Ashforth and Tomiuk, (2000), and aligns with an element of Marx's alienation theory. The suggestion by Maxwell and Riley (2017) who conducted emprirical research with 1320 school principals, is that regardless of the level of job satisfaction school leaders experience, high levels of emotional demand impact on their wellbeing, and their hypothesis is that the cognition involved in deep acting becomes overwhelming in the persistent ongoing interactions that school leaders experience. Additionally, there is an expectation that leaders will present optimism, even when they are facing the same crisis as followers, requiring emotional suppression and surface acting which may results in emotional dissonance, (Humphrey, Pollack and Hawver, 2008). However, their work fails to describe the mundane, day-to-day emotion work undertaken by leaders and it is this aspect of leadership in autism specific special schools that can require significant emotional labour, as the students attending such schools require emotional consistency to successfully engage in social communication (AET, no date), which may result in emotional dissonance for leaders. This dissonance can be particularly elevated in schools that have received an inadequate rating from Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education), with the headteacher struggling to present what they deem as a professionally acceptable face to all stakeholders and the resultant stress impacting on their wellbeing, (Crawford, 2009; Humphrey, 2012; Oplakta, 2017). High levels of emotional dissonance are not sustainable over long periods of time and can lead to emotional exhaustion (Humphrey, Pollack and Hawver, 2008), and in recognising this, Ashforth and Humphrey (1983) purport that actors either leave their job or internalise the dissonance as a coping strategy.

An interesting point raised by Zapf, (2002) regarding emotional dissonance is not so much the mismatch between the emotions as felt and as expressed, but the frequency with which this disparity occurs. This author suggests that due to the social interaction difficulties that students with autism experience and the challenges they have in recognising and managing their own emotions, known as alexithymia, (Gaigg, Crawford and Cotterell, 2018) the requirement for school leaders working with these individuals to suppress their naturally felt

emotions is far more frequent than for leaders in mainstream environments. Additionally, many of the interactions with students may be negative as senior leaders support students who may be exhibiting behaviour which challenges, which will also impact on the emotional dissonance experienced.

Recognition should be given to the cultural differences that may be involved in displays of emotion and school leaders may need to suppress or simulate their emotional responses to a greater or lesser extent depending on their cultural context, (Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, 2006). Blackmore (2010, p 642) opines that there is growing consensus that leadership involves emotion management, and that leadership learning is 'emotionally laden'. There is a suggestion by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004) that school leaders adapt to the dissonance that they feel, thereby reorganising the direction and meaning of their experiences. School leaders are required to manage their own dissonance as well as that experienced by others, with Blackmore (2004; 2010) referring to the emotional management work needed by school principals in Australia to address the dissonance felt by teaching staff who desire to make a difference for students against the expectations of performativity. The levels of emotional control that principals adopt can result in physiological effects, and Blackmore refers to her overview of four research projects where one principal describes these effects, including chest pains and pain in her right arm, (Blackmore, 2004, p 447).

However, an alternative view is suggested by some authors (Price, 2001; Mackenzie, 2012; Humphrey, Ashforth and Diefendorff, 2015) where the emotional rewards of teachers outweigh the emotional labour involved, with Harris (2007, p 46) stating that: 'Unless leaders are able to engage with these emotional, cognitive and behavioural challenges, their leadership remains a superficial, bureaucratic and essentially ineffective activity'. It should be noted at this point that Mackenzie highlights the specific requirements of working in SEN schools that results in more demanding roles than those in mainstream schools. This research will explore whether this is true for leaders of autism specific special schools.

2.4.3 Gift Exchange

A concept suggested by Hochschild, (1983) for the expected emotional reactions from an emotional associate is that of gift exchange. She refers to the contribution of emotion for the collective benefit and cites scenarios such as the 'muted anger' that a parent may feel for a child or the 'conjured gratitude' from a wife to her husband as examples of this. An alternative term for this concept introduced by Grandey and Gabriel (2015) is that of resource gains and losses. Their suggestion is that displaying positive emotions results in positive feedback from an emotional associate and this contributes to a resource. The converse of this is when surface acting results in a depletion of resource. Resources that the authors opine lead to more positive outcomes for the employee are financial, psychological and social, with the rewards protecting the employee from the effects of emotional labour. One of the components of these resources is positive emotions, where actors actively engage in transforming themselves to be healthy, creative, socially engaged and resilient. Fredrickson, cited in Day, (2014), suggests that the resources gained during these episodes of positive emotions are enduring and help the management of adversity.

A concept introduced by Flintham (2003) in his research of 14 headteachers who had left the profession early, describes these inner resources that school leaders possess as a 'reservoir', explaining how this must be replenished to avoid burn out. Several strategies are suggested for this replenishment, including compartmentalising feelings, pacing oneself and networking outside of school. One suggestion of the current research is that school leaders in autism specific special schools have fewer opportunities for the social rewards resource within school due to the social communication and interaction difficulties experienced by the students and some parents that they work with on a daily basis. This perceived lack of social reward will be explored further during this study.

2.4.4 Display Rules

As previously noted, one of the elements of emotional labour described by Hochschild (1983) is that of display rules, where a particular organisation has expectations of the emotional responses of staff, and this is observable in schools, where the display of positive emotions by staff is accepted, whereas negative emotions are discouraged. This 'performance' was

recognised by Goffman as early as 1959 (p 36): 'A certain bureaucratization of the spirit is expected so that we can be relied upon to give a perfectly homogenous performance at every appointed time'. Goffman expands on this by suggesting that each social interaction is a different bubble which has its own traditions, rules and history, and within which, we play a defined role, and this may align with the varied expectations of the range of stakeholders that senior leaders in autism specific special schools engage with.

The intense emotionality of school leadership and the enduring relationships with a range of stakeholders is acknowledged, but our knowledge of how emotions are managed is scant, (Iszatt-White, 2016; Oplatka, 2017) An interesting point raised in Oplatka's research of 10 Israeli school leaders was the clear distinction between affective empathy or compassion, where they were providing assistance to parents, staff or students as opposed to just feeling 'mercy' towards them. The study asserts that by regulating their emotions, school leaders foster positive relationships with all stakeholders, which result in better outcomes for the school, and it will be interesting to explore this element with participants in the current research project. Iszatt-White's view is that the combination of ongoing relationships, the hierarchical nature of a leadership role and the consistency required within this, and the range of emotional associates (individual or group) result in a complex role that requires more than the original form of emotional labour described by Hochschild (1983). The requirement is for leaders to respond in an appropriate manner to each situation as '*a situation*' (Iszatt-White, 2016, p 7, *sic*) whilst ensuring that they display the required emotions, which may be not only professional and social display rules, but also the suppression or elevation of felt emotions explicitly used as a leadership tool. However, there is no guidance for leaders on how to achieve these appropriate responses across the range of stakeholders, potentially leaving them to construct their own set of tools.

Sachs and Blakemore, writing about their empirical research in 1998 (p 271), posit that the 17 Australian principals learnt early in their careers that there were implicit rules regarding the display of emotions, with phrases such as 'you never showed you couldn't cope' being dominant. The control of emotions and feelings was deemed to be paramount for the actor to be considered as a serious school leader and a candidate for promotion. Professionalism was frequently cited, although the authors state that this was a substitution for being in control,

which the participants viewed as a requisite for their leadership role. The authors further suggest that the research participants internalised their role, thereby governing their emotions and behaviours in the workplace. One participant is quoted as stating that they put on a brave face to hide their extreme disappointment, an element of display rules that this research will seek to explore in greater depth.

Leading is arduous work and there will always be detractors from those who dislike the strategies, direction or personality of the leader. Gallos (2016) cites Sigford who uses the term 'emotional Teflon' to describe the ability to not let criticism and negativity stick and introduces the concept of emotion magnets (p 46), for those who appear to attract stakeholder emotions, a term which the current research participants may relate to. When conducting research with 21 aspiring school leaders in Australia, Gronn and Lacey (2004, p 414) state that their participants had an emerging realisation that, as well as managing their own emotions, they had to be 'containers for the feelings of others'. Some professions are trained in the clinical detachment required to avoid absorbing the emotions of others, (Falender and Shafranske, 2014; Martin, Kumar and Lizarondo, 2017) but many, including staff at autism specific special schools do not receive this level of training, with the potential resultant impact on their emotional management.

Leaders of autism specific special schools are not only managing the emotions of students, due to the limited management structures in these smaller schools, but also supporting staff to manage their consequent emotions and may not be skilled in protecting themselves from these emotional experiences. Gallos (2016) purports that those who are repeatedly exposed to strong emotions 'may become more vulnerable to emotional pain' (p 48) with resultant unhealthy bodily responses. An interesting term introduced by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski is that of emotional health (2004, p 311), indicating that the daily challenges faced by school leaders can impact on both their emotional health and that of the school. Without a clear definition from the authors, it is difficult to ascertain how this terminology differs from other concepts.

2.5 School leadership

'The landscape of educational leadership in the twenty-first century offers a range of emotional challenges rarely acknowledged or appreciated'. (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004, p 311)

2.5.1 School leadership and emotion

Much of our understanding regarding emotional labour and education comes from research which focuses on teaching and support staff (see Crawford et al., 2018; Fried, Mansfield and Dobozy, 2015; Schutz and Lanehart, 2002; Truta, 2014, for examples). However, Ashton-Smith (2011), suggests that leaders of autism specific special schools engage in emotional labour daily and this brings its own challenges. As has been demonstrated earlier in this chapter, school leadership is influenced by many contexts: national, local, school, community and personal (including staff, students, parents, local authorities and Governors), all of which impact on the school leader's personal, emotional response to a given situation (Crawford, 2007; Cowie and Crawford, 2008; Morrison and Ecclestone, 2011). In their research exploring the experiences of 5 primary school principals in Scotland and England during the first year of their appointment, Cowie and Crawford (2008) describe the range of issues addressed by the research participants, of which 13 are detailed, ranging from 'emotionally upset support staff' and 'supporting single parents in critical incidents involving family disputes' to dealing with 'parental complaints and demands in relation to staff', (p 681). These are just a sample of the incidents reported, and whilst they have much in common with autism specific special school leaders, the latter have, in the author's professional experience, the additional element of student alexithymia, as already described, and the impact that this can have on staff who, along with the student, then require support from the school leader.

Recent empirical research of 190 Israeli school teachers , indicates that they are less likely to suffer stress and the resultant burnout when school leaders provide emotional support, but the authors do not address the impact on leaders of providing this support, (Berkovich and Eyal, 2017) . The researchers identify three practices; empathic listening, empowerment messages and normalization messages), although the latter of these is more contentious as it may lead

to lower organisational commitment. In larger schools, this support may be delegated to other members of the senior leadership team, but in smaller special schools this is not possible as the leadership structure is much reduced. Being cognisant of this and acknowledging the social interaction and emotional regulation difficulties that accompany an autism diagnosis, the data from this vital research will indicate whether the management of emotions should form a core element of the continuing professional development and support for senior leaders working with autistic young people.

Redmond (2016, p 19) carried out research of 730 secondary school leaders in Ireland and explains that although emotions may have previously been viewed as a feminine characteristic, it is now recognised that 'soft skills' can achieve desired outcomes and that schools leaders now need to be empathic, warm and collegiate. Blackmore's assertion (2004, p 452) that women in leadership roles '… cannot display anger as can powerful men, because it is seen to be unfeminine. Women can be positively passionate about their work, but not negative….' is an interesting point and one that is supported by Mackenzie (2012) who states that female teachers in particular are engaged in emotional labour and emotion work, whilst Beatty (2000) posits that the stricter emotional display rules for leaders may result in a more intensive experience for females. However, Crawford (2007) highlights that role acquisition can be positive as well as negative for both male and female school leaders and this is supported by Redmond (2016) who reports that males who adopt caring positions have a similar capacity for this role as women. 'Leadership is a social practice dependent on relationships that are both fraught and fulfilling, requiring, particularly for principals, emotional management work of themselves and of others.' (Blackmore, 2010, p 642).

As Harris (2004) suggests, much of the research on school leadership focuses on what school leaders should be doing rather than exploring the emotional aspects of leading a school. The researcher suggests that due to the enduring nature of the student/staff /parent interactions, the emotional labour involved for school leaders, particularly in smaller schools such as autism specific special schools, where there may be two or three senior leaders and no other tier of management, is exaggerated. This is supported by research which posits that the emotion work of school leaders in smaller schools is intensified due to the smaller management structures inherent in these establishments, (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2011;

Crawford, 2007a). Based on their study of 97 primary school leaders in the Republic of Ireland, Brennan and Mac Ruairc (2011) suggest that the person centred nature of school leadership can result in school leaders blurring the lines between personal and professional, resulting in burn out, particularly in smaller schools where the leadership team members also have teaching commitments. They further state that teachers now seek leaders who are more emotionally connected, supportive and caring, a suggestion supported by Berkovich and Eyal (2015) whose empirical review found that school leaders are perceived by others, and indeed perceive themselves, as supporting the emotional regulation of others and effecting positive emotional change. This potential intensification of emotional labour in smaller schools leads to the second question:

RQ2 What contextual and environmental factors in an autism specific special school further impact on school leaders' emotional labour?

In their study of Australian women in leadership roles in primary and secondary schools, Sachs and Blakemore (1998) discovered that to be effective leaders, either emotional management or the ability to make emotions disappear was required. Whilst this research is over 20 years old, the challenge of budgets, government policy and the best interests of staff and students remain, which the authors define as emotional labour. The developmental levels of those that headteachers interact with, whether staff, students, parents or members of the local community vary considerably as do the levels of emotional arousal, resulting in an ongoing emotionally demanding role as evidenced by Maxwell and Riley's empirical study of 1,320 full-time Australian school principals, (Maxwell and Riley, 2017). The elevated levels of emotional arousal and the reported burnout and loss of well-being discussed by Maxwell and Riley are mirrored in the United Kingdom and the possibility is that in autism specific special schools, there may be the added complexity of parents who have been in conflict with their local authority regarding school placement, and who continue to interact using a confrontational style, an area which will be further explored in the current research study.

A range of social interactions styles are required by school leaders for these varied professional relationships and in special schools, where there may be high numbers of

support staff including on-site therapists, nurses and other specialists, (Male and Male, 2001), the associated emotional knowledge for a range of emotional associates is key due to the influence that the school leaders can impart. The requirement to present as in control, calm and rational to all stakeholders whilst being able to manage their diverse needs can result in high emotional demands, (Berkovich and Eyal, 2015; Maxwell and Riley, 2017), such as decisions regarding the suppression or amplification of emotions depending on the emotional associate the leader is interacting with and this expected rationality requires the management of emotional responses to situations, ensuring the expected display rules are met. 'Emotions can help the smooth running of the school but can also hinder it; one's role as leader is to manage and regulate these emotions' (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2011, p 136)

As a result of her empirical research of primary school heads and the emotional work they undertake, Crawford (2009) suggests that the term 'affect' is used when making a general point regarding the emotional aspects of a given behaviour. She further posits that affect in schools consists of three elements: feelings (internally experienced); emotions (the external display of feelings) and moods (feelings that endure for a period of time) (Crawford, 2009), although she does not articulate why these terms are particularly pertinent to schools. There is, however, no indication by Crawford as to how long a feeling must endure to become a mood, whilst Oatley Keltner and Jenkins, (2006) have attempted to define the difference between two of these elements as follows. An emotion lasts for a limited period, with the accompanying facial expressions and physiological responses lasting for a few seconds, and the overall emotional episode lasting from minutes to a few hours. Emotions have a focus, usually associated with a specific event or person. Conversely, moods lack this focus, lasting from a few hours to as long as a few weeks, with the start and finish of the particular mood unclear. Emotions have a function and one of these is to orientate the individual to certain environmental aspects, directing attention to possible opportunities and threats. Bodily processes can be interrupted during emotional events, such as not eating and physiological changes may include elevated heart rate, tensing of muscles and shallow breathing. However, not all individuals recognise or experience emotions in this way or in a manner that society deems is socially acceptable, and this relates to those with a diagnosis of autism (Gaigg, Cornell and Bird, 2016), who may lack the emotional experiences of neurotypical individuals, further impacting the emotion work of senior leaders in autism specific special schools.

Leaders should develop an awareness of their own emotional needs and the impact that their professional and personal stories have on their ability to effect change within their school (Harris, 2007; Schmidt, 2010). School leadership is emotionally based with daily interactions with students, staff, parents Governors and members of the local community and this is recognised by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski who state that school leaders experience intense emotions regarding isolation, vulnerability and fear (2004). Harris recognises this vulnerability by suggesting that each school will have colleagues who are challenging, those who may be influenced by '..a destructive emotional agenda..' (Harris, 2007, p 50), and delight in sabotaging new initiatives and undermining colleagues and leaders.

There is a suggestion that if an individual can manage their emotions effectively, they are more likely to experience professional success (Cliffe, 2011). Cliffe's research with secondary school leaders suggests that when school leaders decide on a particular course of action, the harnessing of feelings experienced indicates how emotionally attuned the leader is. However, this research is based solely on 7 female secondary headteachers and because of this, whilst there is in depth analysis of the respondent's experiences, one is left wondering whether these would be more diverse with a more gender balanced sample. The headteachers in Cliffe's research were easily able to manage or mask emotions and talked about leaving their domestic emotions at the school gate and assuming a persona when they are at work. Gunter refers to this as the habitus of heads and senior leaders, where '…..they are disposed to have their professional lives embodied to the extent that it is a core part of their identities.' (Gunter, 2001, p 101). Goffman (1959) suggested that for every social interaction we encounter, a role is adopted in which we can become positively or negatively engaged. When relating this concept to educational leadership, emotions are regulated against what leaders are expected to do (Crawford, 2007), and the impacts of this role adoption can be positive or negative.

When discussing policy changes and the hours teachers are expected to work Harris states that '….teaching has become literally heart-breaking and soul-destroying work' (Harris, 2007, p 14), whilst Schmidt (2010) highlights the increasingly complex roles of school leaders. Whilst the Harris quote relates to teachers, she also discusses the desirable characteristics of school leaders and includes within these emotional attunement, as 'Fragile

emotions can erupt into tears of distress, outbursts of righteous anger or implode as in shame and depression', (Harris, 2007, p 41). The fallout that can occur as a result of the day to day decisions made by educational leaders needs to be acknowledged and many leaders are unprepared for this as it is not an element that is addressed in training (Schmidt, 2010). Harris further talks about a concept of 'emotional fitness' (Harris, 2007, p 45) and suggests that this is premised on developing emotional literacy. The concept of 'emotional fitness' is not well described in her book and this researcher posits that it brings another aspect of emotion work into an arena is already replete with similar concepts. There is a suggestion that 'Only a few studies explore the underlying emotional dynamic of school leaders' work' (Harris, 2007, p. 48), and this research will go some way to filling that gap for leaders of autism specific special schools.

2.5.2 Recent changes in School Leadership

Over the past twenty years there has been a paradigm shift in society's approach to education which a number of researchers assert is due to neoliberalism, (Ball, 2003, 2012; Lynch, 2013, 2014; Lynch, Grummel and Devine, 2012). Previously, education was managed centrally by the government, but this management was devolved to local education authorities with an accompanying focus on performativity and the commodification of education, (Ball, 2003, 2012; Lynch 2014; Schmidt, 2010). Private sector practices were introduced with school leaders having to become familiar with a discourse which included league tables, target setting, and performance management aligned with performance related pay. With associated higher levels of accountability and recording, school leaders discovered that stakeholders were now to be viewed as customers, (Ball, 2003). The rise in the use of social media has led to some of these stakeholders forming groups who may try to influence the decisions of school leaders and be vociferous in their disappointment if their views and suggestions are not adhered to (Lynch, 2014), which Schmidt, (2010) suggests applies additional pressure for the commodification of education.

Leaders of independent special schools are also subject to the associated demands and expectations of placing authorities, which require a new set of knowledge and skills, as fee setting and budgetary control fall within their remit. Adopting market principles to ensure

that schools remain on a sound financial footing can lead to additional emotional labour for senior leaders in autism specific special schools as there may be a conflict between the commercial and educational outcomes, as highlighted by Lynch, (2014) who explores the commodification of education.

In addition to high emotional demands and the move towards performativity and greater levels of accountability, there has recently been a trend towards identifying resilience as a requirement for school leadership (Morrison and Ecclestone, 2011), as evidenced by the following phrase from a recruitment advertisement for the Headteacher of a new school for autism in London (Times Educational Supplement, 2019): 'We need you to be resilient, supportive and sensitive towards the needs of autistic people'. Although not classified as an emotion, this researcher posits that resilience can lessen the impact of emotion work when leading schools for autistic children.

2.6 Resilience

The Collins on-line dictionary defines resilience as:

- 'the ability to bounce or spring back into shape, position, etc.
- the ability to recover strength, spirits, good humour etc. quickly'

One of the mitigating factors for emotional labour is posited to be resilience. Moon and Shin, (2018), conducted research with 126 care workers in South Korea who engage in similar roles as educationalists due to their interpersonal relationships, and found that the suppression of negative emotions led to burnout, but that resilience was a protecting factor against this. Further, they state that actors with higher resilience levels are protected against burnout, even when the levels of emotional labour experienced are higher.

As with emotional intelligence, there are multiple definitions of resilience including optimism; courage; moral purpose; persistence in the face of difficulties; inner resourcefulness and the capacity to bounce back from setbacks (see Day and Schmidt, 2007;

Day et al., 2011; Fullan, 2005; Mansfield et al., 2012 and Steward, 2014 for further definitions). Fullan (2005, p 18), writing about school leaders in the United States, suggests that resilience requires a 'plan and a modus operandi …', enabling educational establishments to demonstrate progress, whilst it is recognised that individuals will differ in their characteristics which will, in turn, impact on their levels of resilience, (Robertson and Cooper, 2013), and it is the ability to develop this characteristic that will be explored during this research project.

Resilience is cited as a requirement for school leaders and teachers, with Flintham (2003, p 22) suggesting that school leaders should have 'high levels of emotional resilience' and Day et al., (2011) purporting that school leaders should support the development of resilience in school teachers. One of the case studies within Day et al.'s research (2011, p 14) suggests that the 'Absence of resilience at the most senior levels of leadership in schools ..' can impact on a range of areas in the school and result in a decline in the school's functioning. However, despite recognising the impact if a school leader lacks resilience, the authors do not discuss what should happen if this is the case or even recognise that leaders may need developmental support in this area.

It is well recognised that school leaders face issues such as management of tasks and staff, isolation, work-life balance and stress, whilst continuing to support their students, staff and the wider community. When looking at the main challenges faced by new school leaders, it is acknowledged by The National College for School Leadership that these leaders become resilient individuals, stating that 'resilience and emotional maturity' are essential competencies for effective headteachers (2010, p 31). Unfortunately, there is a lack of guidance on how to overcome any barriers that may be encountered in the acquisition of this competency and the current research will explore the emotional resilience of participants as when stress builds up reactions are not controlled by reason, but by emotion (Steward, 2014), hampering rational decisions, until the emotion aroused can be addressed and the brain returns to cognitive decision making.

School leaders lead across a range of social arenas, many of which are emotionally charged and enduring, requiring them to be emotionally resilient (Day, 2014; Harris, 2007; Patterson and Kelleher, 2005). Day's research explored the experiences of 12 school leaders in disadvantaged communities and suggested that the range of issues faced by these leaders is greater than those leading school in less disadvantaged areas and this researcher purports that this is similar to leaders of autism special schools due to the social and emotional challenges already documented. Research suggests that school leaders should take responsibility for organisational resilience but does not explore how this would happen if the leader concerned is not resilient (Day, 2014; Harris, 2007).

Patterson and Kelleher (2005, p 147) posit that resilient school leaders have six strengths as follows:

- 'they accurately assess past and current reality
- they are positive about future realities
- they are clear about what matters most in the hierarchy of values
- they maintain a strong sense of personal efficacy
- they invest personal energy wisely
- they act on the courage of personal convictions'

The ability to build resilience and develop well-being through a good work-life balance are recognised as crucial for school leaders (Sardar and Galdames, 2018), with Mackenzie (2012) positing that resilient teachers are more able to avoid burnout. In an empirical study of 6 school principals in New Zealand, (Notman and Henry, 2011), one of the six identified characteristics of successful school leaders was resilience, whilst participants in Mackenzie's research (2012) highlighted the need for teachers in SEN schools to be resilient, due to the complexity of the students they supported, with some participants referring to the emotional distancing needed from students and parents to maintain their emotional energy. This concept frames the final research question:

RQ3 What strategies do leaders of schools for children with autism employ for the management of their emotional labour, and how do they build emotional resilience?

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed a sample of the literature for three main concepts: emotional labour, alienation theory and resilience, and explored how these may impact leaders of autism special schools, where, by their nature, school leadership teams are small, and leaders may have teaching commitments alongside their leadership responsibilities. The interface between these three main concepts and the impact of one on the other have been explored, with key questions suggested for the current research project. An explanation as to why these factors may be intensified in autism special schools has been put forward, describing the social and emotional challenges that autistic individuals experience and the influence that these have on staff, particularly school leaders, suggested.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

It can be seen from the previous chapter that there are many different perspectives on emotional management, influencing the theoretical framework for this thesis. However, three main concepts have been identified: emotional labour, role alienation and emotional resilience, and this unique research project explores the impact of these on leaders of autism specific special schools. The research questions, as detailed in the previous chapter, aim to explore the emotional encounters and rewards experienced by participant school leaders.

This chapter will outline the empirical research undertaken for this thesis, demonstrating that the methodology employed is both valid and ethical. The initial section of the chapter will examine the methodology adopted, the theory underpinning it and how this theory relates to the relativist ontological view. The context within which the research takes place, the participants taking part in the research and the researcher's role will be detailed, as will some of the challenges associated with researching emotion and school leadership in autism specific special schools. The tools used and the rationale for their use will be explained, with critical analysis of data collection methods. Finally, the ethical implications of such research will be explored, particularly the aspect of trust and insider research which are incorporated into the Research Ethics section, as these are key elements of this research project. This chapter is divided into the following sections: 3.2 Paradigm Rationale; 3.3 Methodological Approach; 3.4 Constructivism and Social Constructionism; 3.5 Participants and Context; 3.6 Pilot Study; 3.7 Data Collection, including data analysis; 3.8 Quality Criteria; 3.9 Research Ethics and finally, 3.10 Conclusion.

3.2 Research Paradigms

The debate surrounding research paradigms has been primarily defined by two diametrically opposed research philosophies, positivism and interpretivism, (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Kumar, 2014). The debate, however, has progressed, and a number of new paradigms have emerged (post positivism, pragmatism and critical theory as examples), alongside the

question of what constitutes truth, with Cohen et al., (2011) suggesting that the discovery of absolute truth has limitations. The social science research journey to 'truth' should be systematic, ethical and sceptical, whilst clarifying that ethical responsibility overrides truth seeking. One can question whether social beings should have an expectation of complete 'truth' as the contextual perspective will always impact research paradigms.

Research methodology publications suggest that the two main paradigms are at each end of a continuum, with positivism and its association with objectivity and known reality at one end and interpretivism and associations with subjectivity and the social construction of reality at the other. McWilliams (2016, p 2) suggests that these two diametrically opposed views lead to adherents of one perspective finding the alternative viewpoint 'puzzling and nonsensical'. The current study is concerned with the social constructions of participant school leaders and therefore falls within the remit of an interpretivist paradigm, but even within this paradigm there is different terminology, and this will be explored further in the following sections.

3.3 Interpretivist Paradigm

A question for this research is whether senior leaders in autism specific special schools experience emotional labour and whether they are receiving the support they need linked to their emotional labour experiences. To further explore this, an interpretivist approach (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Flood, 2010; Gentles et al., 2015; Kumar, 2014; Robson 2011) will allow the voice of those who currently hold leadership positions in participant autism specific special schools to be heard. This research is limited in terms of this particular topic and as such, makes a contribution to practice for senior leaders in these specific provisions.

In recognition of the variable world views that form foundations for social inquiry, an interpretivist approach with its relativist ontology has been adopted as this allows for the exploration and understanding of the meanings that individuals ascribe to a social or human situation. The open and flexible nature of such a paradigm provides an opportunity to explore the diverse perceptions and experiences of participants (Creswell, 2014; Kumar, 2014; Thomas 2007), with thick descriptions providing deeper understanding of the

phenomenon being explored. Whilst there may be an aim towards consensus of these reconstructions, there is a recognition of novel interpretations as further information becomes available to the researcher, (Guba and Lincoln, 1982). During this research process, questions are broad, facilitating the construction of meaning by participants, whilst seeking to comprehend their understanding and acknowledge that context influences their experiences, (Creswell, 2014; Thomas, 2007). Cohen et at., (2011, p 21) state that qualitative approaches, which are adopted within an interpretivist paradigm, have some features which distinguish them from a positivist framework: the unique nature of individuals and events; the lack of generalizability; the complex and multi-layered nature of reality and the need to view the world 'through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher'. In adopting this paradigm, the author has noted that Creswell (2014) advises that if there is a lack of research regarding a particular phenomenon, then a qualitative approach is merited, and as has been noted in the previous chapter, there is a paucity of research regarding the emotional labour undertaken by school leaders in autism specific special schools. The aim with such an approach is not to claim generalisability but to provide a window through which the participants' intersubjectivity can be viewed. These experiences will, by their nature, be open to individual interpretations and interrelations, with the variability in constructions recognised (Guba and Lincoln, 1982; May, 2011; Schwandt 1994).

An interpretivist approach will allow the individual participants to interpret his/her experiences during the process of gathering views. However, the position that 'the most basic human truths are accessible only through inner subjectivity.' (Flood, 2010, p 7), holds true for this research, and the social constructionist paradigm, with its focus on co-constructed realities, interpretations, context and experiences for research participants encompasses this (Burr, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil, 2002). Constructionism acknowledges the subjective and interactional epistemological position that will allow the research process to be interactive and creative, revealing meanings as interpreted by the participants. It is the lived experiences of participants that is the focus of this research (Aagaard, 2017; Flood, 2010; Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie, 2015) and the dialectical methodological stance acknowledges the continuing interaction that will take place between participants and the researcher. At this point, it should be acknowledged that this research is not claiming generalisability or transferability, rather, the research seeks thick descriptions of the experiences of social actors (Guba and Lincoln, 1982), with the further recognition that

the researcher's positionality will influence the thematic interpretation of the data (Da Costa, Hall and Spear, 2016; Robson, 2011; Scotland, 2012, Thomas, 2007), which will be discussed in Section 3.7.

3.4 Constructivism and social constructionism

This research has adopted a social constructionist (aligned but not identical to constructivist) epistemological approach, as this most closely supports the aims of the research and encourages the exploration of individuals' social interaction experiences and the underlying meanings that they ascribe to these, (Barkway, 2001; Creswell, 2014; Floyd, 2012: Killam, 2013: Robson, 2011, Thomas, 2007). It should be noted here that the terms used to describe this research approach have changed over time, with Guba and Lincoln in 1982 (p 237), using the terms 'rationalistic' and 'naturalistic' to describe the positivist and constructivist approaches to research, and Cohen et al., (2011) referring to positivism and anti-positivism. Schwandt (1994) separated interpretivism and constructivism as two distinct approaches, although they both seek interpretations of meaning for social actors but in 2018, Walliman referred to relativism and stated that this was also known as 'interpretivism, idealism, constructivism or even constructionism' (p 23). The interchangeable use of these terms can lead a novice researcher to question which terms should be used.

The inconsistency in research literature of the terms constructivism and constructionism can be confusing, with Bryman (2012) stating equivalency between the terms and Burr stating, in her paper of 2018, that constructivism and social constructionism would be 'considered under the single rubric of "constructivism"'. Robson (2011) differs, however, referring to constructivist and constructionist as two differing approaches with the former being research of an individual's constructs and beliefs and the latter, group constructs, discourse, cultural contexts and beliefs, leading to many authors referring to social constructionism (Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Doan, 1997; Neimeyer and Torres, 2015; Osbeck, 2018; Raskin, 2018). This term is elaborated by Raskin and Debany (2018) who believe that social constructionism facilitates the roles that we adopt in relation to each other, alongside our mutually held, socially shared constructions, with Barkway (2001) concurring, positing that constructionism emphasises that meaning is socially constructed rather than an individual's construct of the

phenomena encountered. When analysing constructivism, Raskin and Debany suggest that situations external to a social actor trigger within them responses which are based on their psychological and physical entities and that these responses are particular to the individual actors and their interpretation of their experiences. Burr (2003, p 20) further clarifies this by suggesting that constructivism is where an individual controls the construction process whilst constructionism involves 'social forces'. She further emphasises the importance of social discourse and social meaning when adopting a social constructionist position. McNamee (2018, p 363) opines that the two different perspectives (constructivism and social constructionism) have many overlapping features, with one of the main characteristics being the 'multiple realities' which are reinforced by communities and their traditions and cultures.

This researcher considered both approaches and made the decision to refer to the social constructionist epistemological position for this thesis, as the aim was to uncover the meanings that individual actors ascribed to the emotion work undertaken in leading autism specific special schools, and this, by its nature, involved social interactions and common discourse within communities of practice.   It was the desire to understand the frames of reference which the participants ascribed to their interactions with social actors, that influenced this decision.

The current study aims to investigate the 'subjective meanings' (Creswell, 2014, p 8) that the participants have developed of the emotional labour that they engage in and acknowledges that, from an ontological perspective, these 'intangible mental constructions' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p 110) are contextually based and specific to the individuals whose constructions they are. There is no 'truth' to each construction, but merely differing levels of information and sophistication. By paying close attention to the words that participants use to describe their experiences and the body language exhibited, the researcher will be exploring the participants understanding of how emotional labour impacts on their daily experiences as a senior leadership team member within an autism specific special school. The epistemological view is transactional in that the respondents and the interviewer create an agreed 'reality' for each participant, and each reality may differ from another. It should be noted at this point that the researcher is aware that the participants will each bring their own contextual experiences to their interpretations of events, and in this way, meanings will be co-

constructions between the researcher and the respondents. New meanings may emerge during this process as information and understanding improves (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), and these will be incorporated into the data analysis.

The final element of the social constructionist paradigm to discuss is that of the positionality of the researcher. Here, the researcher acknowledges the point made by Creswell (2014), that the qualitative approach adopted allows for a more literary approach to writing, which chimes with the researcher's positionality as an English graduate. It should also be noted that as an actor who has worked within the environments where the research is being undertaken, there is a recognition that the researcher's own constructions and interpretations may influence their interpretation of the data when analysis takes place, and this will be explored in the data analysis section of this chapter.

3.5 Participants and Context

As the phenomenon to be explored was particular to autism specific special schools, the sampling process adopted was theoretical or purposive/purposeful (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Gentles et al., 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015; Seidman, 2019; Suri, 2011), as the individual interview participants were chosen to help the researcher develop a theory. As Robson (2011, p 154) suggests, the interviewees were 'good informants', or, in Creswell's words, they were a 'culture-sharing group' (2014, p 19), who were familiar with the phenomenon and had relevant information. The participants were also individuals who were prepared to enter a dialogue with the researcher and speak about their emotional experiences as school leaders. The question of the number of participants was considered, although the recommendations vary between authors. Creswell, (2014) suggests that for such a study, between three and ten participants would be appropriate, whereas Braun and Clarke (no date) posit that the ideal range for thematic analysis is between ten and twenty when undertaking a professional doctorate. However, contrary to this, in their paper of 2019(a), Braun and Clarke state that trying to determine the sample size prior to undertaking interpretive qualitative research is problematic, stating that the number of participants may be reduced dependent on the information contained in each sample. For pragmatic reasons, this researcher made the decision to approach eleven potential participants, nine of whom were able to take part in the research within the timeframes available.

In total, three schools took part in the research, two of which were known to the researcher, and one that agreed to take part in the project after hearing about it through a mutual colleague. Each of the participants worked in, or in one case, had recently left, an autism specific special school in the south of England. The participant who had left one of the schools a month prior to their interview had joined an autism diagnostic service in the south of England but had worked at the school in question for over five years as a senior leader. All three schools were independent co-educational day schools with no more than 75 students at each and as such, were considered small in the context of SEN schools. Total numbers of staff at the schools were in the range of 35-45, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and school nurses. All students at the schools had autism as their primary diagnosis, although there were other co-morbid conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), elevated anxiety and speech and language disorders. At each school, the senior leadership team had either 3 or 4 members, and there was no tier of middle management. A decision was made not to interview leaders from residential autism specific special schools as the staffing and leadership team composition in these schools is different to that in day schools, and whilst not claiming generalisability for this research, the author wanted similar leadership structures as far as was possible.

Whilst acknowledging that sample size is a frequent question for qualitative researchers, this study has acknowledged the work of Boddy, (2016) who reports that the literature on this important aspect is sparse. One of the key aspects for sample size in qualitative research is saturation (Boddy, 2016; Dworkin, 2012; Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016) with Boddy suggesting that data saturation became evident after six in depth interviews. A key point posited by Malterud et al. is that of specificity of knowledge and experience relating to the study in question. The current study wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of emotional labour in a specific educational setting, and taking Boddy's comments into consideration, it was felt that a sample size of nine participants was justified. The interviews from these nine participants generated a total of 29,306 words for data analysis.

The headteachers of each of the three autism specific special schools were contacted by email, with information on the research project and requesting consent for the research to be undertaken in their school. All three confirmed. The headteachers were asked to suggest senior leadership team members who they thought would be prepared to take part in the research, and the suggested individuals were contacted and provided with information regarding the research and again, requesting consent. One of the headteachers suggested a member of their senior leadership team who had recently moved on but had worked at the school for over five years, and this individual was also contacted by email and provided with research information and requesting consent, which again, was given. The majority of the participants were female, with two male participants, which alerted the researcher to the possibility of different emotion experiences between the genders, but on scrutinising the data, none was apparent.

Pseudonym	Number of years on Senior Leadership Team	Years working in autism specific special school
Mandy	Over 10	3
Brian	2	2
Anna	8	4
Ally	4	5
Elodie	4	6
Charlie	Over 10	17
Pat	3	4
Kath	7	6
Heidi	Over 10	22

Figure 3.1 Interview Participants

With the researcher's prior knowledge of working in autism specific special schools, and their current role working across two of the schools taking part in the research, the identification of possible participants was a relatively easy process. It is acknowledged that the researcher's superior role to some of the respondents may have impacted their responses to interview questions (Appendix 3), and the researcher therefore allocated time to explain

that their responses would only be known to the researcher and the university supervisors, and that anonymity was a key element of the research. At this point, and in recognition of the point made by Creswell (2014) regarding 'backyard' research, the researcher also sought interviews from participants outside of their organisation, in recognition of the power imbalance inherent in interviewing staff known to them as detailed above.

3.6 Pilot Study

It is recommended that a pilot interview/s take place (Drever, 2006), to ascertain whether the questions asked provide the 'thick descriptions' the researcher is seeking. Some broad questions were generated which aimed to allow participants to talk about emotions and emotional management in the workplace, (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003), but would allow the interviewer to explore themes that arose during the interview process in more depth. The researcher also acknowledged that some participants would be more articulate and perceptive than others and so an initial set of questions was formulated to ascertain whether the responses would be likely to provide sufficient data for analysis, and to gauge the maximum duration of the interview.

An initial pilot interview took place in the autumn of 2019, with a volunteer respondent who is a senior leader at one of the three schools involved in the research. Analysis of the responses to the outline questions indicated that the format of the interview, which allowed for follow-on questions, provided some rich data. However, on reflection, the author rephrased the final question so that it was less subjective. The question was originally asked as 'Finally, can you explain how the positives of the work that you do make the emotion management worthwhile', and was altered to 'Finally, can you describe any positives of the work that you do, and whether they make the emotion management worthwhile'. The research was designed to allow participants to answer the questions in the way that they desired, even though, on occasion, this resulted in them veering away from the central topic of the question.

The interviewer also reflected on the advice provided by Robson, (2011, p 282) regarding listening, ensuring the questions were clear, and eliminating cues. The participant in the pilot

project revealed themselves to be a considered, reflective individual and the researcher was aware that not all participants may have this reflective characteristic, and this led to the addition of a pictogram for a second pilot (see below and Appendix 4).

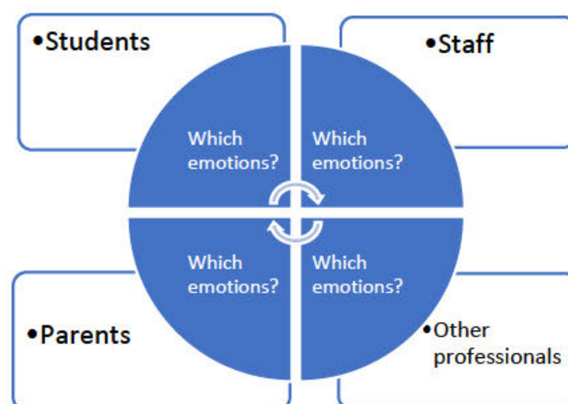

Figure 3.2 Pictogram Used for Second Pilot Interview

The second pilot interview was then run, again, in the autumn of 2019, with the aid of the pictogram, as research indicates that this can prompt memories for the interviewee (JEPS, 2013; Knoblauch et al., 2008) and provide a point of reference during the interview. With an emotive subject matter, such as that of the current research, Bagnoli, (2009) supports the use of images as they may prompt disclosure of sensitive issues, whilst allowing the participant to do so at a pace that suits them. The pictogram was emailed to participants prior to the interview to aid their reflection on the subject matter and facilitate understanding of the issues being discussed. The results of this second interview indicated that the pictogram was a reference point for the participant, with him referring to it at least twice during the interview. The researcher also noted that the respondent did not remember both elements of the question regarding surface and deep acting, and this goes back to Robson's point, (2011) regarding clear questions, and the decision was taken to split the question into two parts. An additional question was added regarding prior awareness of the levels of emotional labour that a senior leadership role in an autism specific special school would involve. Both interviews were recorded which allowed for attentive listening by the interviewer and comments such as *'mmmm', 'yeah'* and *'yes'* assisted with this process. Silences were accepted with the acknowledgement that this allowed the interviewee to compose their thoughts and word their responses accordingly (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010).

It should be noted at this point that the data from both pilot interviews was included in the data corpus. Whilst this may be considered a contamination effect in quantitative research, it is less so for qualitative research with van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) suggesting that pilot data can often be included as part of the main study, as such data may be valuable and the exclusion of this data may result in too small a sample size for the main research study.

The researcher was now in a position to contact autism specific special schools to request access to senior leaders to take part in the research. When confirmation of this was received, along with participant contact details, they were emailed information regarding the research, including the pictogram and requesting their consent

3.7 Data Collection - interviews

Following Robson's guidance (2011) regarding the appropriacy of research tools for the research questions, interviews were identified as the most appropriate data collection instrument. The researcher identified that talking directly to the people who were likely to be engaged in emotional labour on a regular basis would provide rich data for analysis, and acknowledges the point made by Creswell (2014) regarding the researcher as a key instrument in the research. Initial thought was given to the inclusion of focus groups as a starting point for the research, from which key themes would be identified. Volunteers from the focus groups would be requested for in depth individual interviews. However, on reflection, the researcher was of the view that due to the sensitive nature of the subject under discussion, focus group participants may not have been as forthcoming with their responses when their colleagues were present, and it was therefore decided to carry out individual interviews for all data gathering.

Individual interviews provided an arena for more focused discussion on the issues that were pertinent to each participant, allowing probing and follow-on questions where clarification or greater detail was sought, (Belotto, 2018; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Seidman, 2019). Seidman (2019, p 18) writes about four themes that he has identified when conducting

interviews, which include the temporal nature of an individual's experience; the subjective understanding of a phenomenon from the participant's viewpoint; the interviewer's attempts to support the participant to 'reconstitute their lived experience' and the making of meaning of lived experiences. A key point highlighted by Seidman is that whilst researchers may aim for an understanding of their participants experiences, perfect understanding is not possible as to achieve this would indicate that the researcher had identical experiences to the participant and indeed had become the participant.

Interviews are generally of three differing types, structured, semi-structured and unstructured. In this research, a semi-structured approach was adopted with open-ended questions being asked, providing opportunities for participants to use as many or as few words as they chose to give their opinions and views (Creswell, 2014, Robson, 2011). Interviews, when conducted face to face, offer a range of possibilities during the data gathering process, including following up on responses and making notes of body language and facial gestures which accompany the responses, as these can influence the underlying meaning. As stated by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p 4), an interview is an interaction 'where knowledge is constructed ….. between the interviewer and the interviewee', and they refer to seven key features of 'interview knowledge' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p 63): 'produced, relational, conversational, contextual, linguistic, narrative and pragmatic.' It is worthy of note here that interviews are a time-consuming method for gathering data, but the resulting material can reveal issues that have not previously been recognised (Robson, 2011).

Three interviews took place in the autumn term 2019, with the remaining six interviews scheduled from January to April 2020 as this timeframe suited the participants best. It was post the freneticism experienced in many schools in the lead up to Christmas, and prior to the main school examination timetable coming into force. However, this timeframe had to be adjusted due to the Covid-19 pandemic and two of the interviews scheduled for April did not take place until September 2020. Consideration was given by the researcher to conducting the interviews via an on-line platform, but experience indicated that the time lags often experienced when using these platforms and the sometimes pixelated pictures due to poor internet connections would impact on the flow of the interview and the decision was made to postpone the interviews until they could take place face to face. When analysing the data,

close attention was given to ascertain whether there was any discernible impact of lockdown on the two September 2020 interviews, but none was apparent, although this possibility cannot be completely discounted.

All but one of the interviews took place in the schools taking part in the research. Interviewees were offered a choice of location and time for the interview, as the researcher opined that the respondents should be in control of these factors and to ensure that the interview process was not interrupted (Sardar and Galdames, 2018). One interviewee chose to be interviewed in their home, as this would better enable them to give the time that they felt the interview deserved. Whilst this researcher was aware of the points raised by Seidman (2019) regarding the scheduling and location of interviews, both interviewee and interviewer were comfortable with the suggestion of a home interview, as there was an existing professional relationship between them and travel distance was therefore not an issue.

All interviewees agreed to the interviews being recorded, which facilitated active listening on the part of the interviewer and also allowed for close observation of participants body language. Interviews were transcribed immediately after each interview so that the researcher had a memory not only of the body language but also the intonation used by each participant, as it was thought that the emphasis on different words and phrases would have an impact on data analysis, which will be discussed later in this chapter. During transcription, punctuation was used where it could be inferred from the intonation or pauses of the interviewee, (Drever, 2006).

For clarity and to support the reader's understanding of how the interview questions were formulated, the table below indicates how the interview questions mapped onto the overarching research questions.

Research Question	Interview Question/s
What are the experiences and perceptions of emotional labour for school leaders working in autism specific special schools?	• Thinking about an average working week, how frequently do you engage in emotion work? • What type of emotion work do you engage in – how do you manage your emotions? • In the research I've undertaken there are two types of emotion work that it suggests leaders engage in, the first is surface acting, the 'have a nice day,' service with a smile where you don't really feel the emotion that you are portraying. Have you used surface acting in the past, and if so, in what context? • The other is called deep acting, which is where you try and summon up the emotion that you want to portray, so if you've had a bad Ofsted you try and conjure up a positive emotion to present to staff before you go in to give the message. Have you used deep acting in the past, and if so, in what context?
What contextual and environmental factors in an autism specific special school further impact on school leaders emotional labour?	• Were you aware prior to your appointment of the level of emotion work you would be engaged in? • Have there been any key turning points in your emotional management since you've been here? • What keeps you awake at night?
What strategies do leaders of schools for children with autism employ for the management of their emotional labour and how do they build emotional resilience?	• Can you describe any emotion strategies that you use, and with which stakeholders you use them? • Finally, can you describe any positives of the work that you do and whether they make the emotion management worthwhile?

Figure 3.3 Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

3.7.1 Timescale

The timescale below was drawn up after completion of the draft literature review and indicates the proposed schedule for thesis completion, including pilot interviews and their transcription, and the main interview phase. However, due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown in England in March 2020 some of the interviews had to be postponed until the Autumn term 2020.

Phase	Month	Task
Pilot	September 2019	Second interview using pictogram
Main	November 2019	Continue with methodology Interviews/transcription
Main	December 2019	Continue with methodology Interviews/transcription
Main	February 2020	Interviews/transcription
Main	March 2020	Interviews/transcription
Main	April 2020	Interviews/transcription
Analysis	May – July 2020	Initial data analysis
Main	September 2020	Rescheduled interviews
Analysis	October 2020	Continue with data analysis
Final	November 2020 onwards	Write Findings, Discussion and Conclusion
Final	August 2021	Final Thesis check and upload

Figure 3.4 Timescale

3.7.2 Data Analysis

'Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data.' Braun and Clarke, (2006, p 78)

Although collected data may be interesting, the reader's understanding of the subject under scrutiny is not helped until it has been analysed (Basit, 2003). Many authors describe how data should be organised and analysed for qualitative approaches to research (see Burnard et al., 2008; Creswell, 2014; Saldana, 2013; Thomas and Harden, 2008, for examples). The processes suggested include data organisation, a general review of the data set to get a 'feel' for the data, data coding, development of codes to form themes and how these themes inter-

relate for higher level analysis. Whilst these suggested approaches are informative, they do not provide in depth analysis of the recursive process required in coding and theming a data corpus. Burnard et al.'s paper (2008) examines an inductive approach to data analysis, where there is no prior theory to frame the analysis and suggests that this is the most effective method when little is known about the phenomenon under investigation. The authors state that themes emerge from that data when this process is used, whereas Braun and Clarke (2006) clearly state that themes are identified from the data by the researcher and those themes are influenced by the researcher's cultural and social values and beliefs. This author is very aware of their contextual position in the current research and the influence that this will have on theme identification, and therefore approached the thematic analysis of the data corpus using Braun and Clarke's guidance (2006).

The work of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2018) suggests an approach to thematic analysis, but clarifies that it is not a tick sheet to work through or a recipe to be followed, rather that the importance lies in the consistency within which the data is analysed. They further state that analysis is '…not a *linear* process of simply moving from one phase to the next ..' (sic) (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p 86), but that the process is recursive with movement throughout the phases as needed, whilst Basit (2003, p 143) opines that the analytical process enables researchers to gain a 'deeper understanding of what they have studied and to continually refine their interpretations'. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that to facilitate this deeper understanding of the data corpus, six phases are adopted, using an iterative inductive approach to identify categories and themes through a process of familiarisation with the data; analysis; writing and noting codes; exploring themes; reviewing themes; classifying and naming themes and finally writing the report. Creswell (2014) suggests that once comprehensive themes have been established, the researcher should review the data to ascertain whether there is further evidence to support each theme. It is during this organic approach (Clarke and Braun, 2018) that the researcher has most influence on the codes and themes identified. One important point to note is that of data saturation and this author has aligned to Braun and Clarke's (2019a) assertion that when using thematic analysis, which they now term reflexive thematic analysis, there is always the possibility for new meanings to be identified within a data corpus, depending on the researcher undertaking the analysis. 'Codes and coding are likewise context dependent, and particular instances of codes derive at least in part from the particular context in which they are expressed.', Braun and Clarke,

(2019(a), p 10). They further assert that the researcher makes an active decision to stop coding and progress to the generation of themes, rather than suggesting that a point of data saturation has been reached.

This author considered using a software programme to support the analysis process. However, being aware that the programme would not analyse the data, but purely make the management of it easier, a decision was made to carry out all data analysis manually. This was partly due to the time required to become fully familiar with a software programme such as NVivo, but also because the author is aware of their own preference for physical items to manipulate, in this case, typed transcripts of the interviews. Data analysis began after the initial pilot interview and was a continuous process of participant recruitment, interview and data analysis. Each transcribed interview had a graphic on each page to facilitate the researcher's recall of specific data items and had wide margins, allowing for annotation and coding. The researcher is aware that they played an active role in identifying the patterns and themes within the data, rather than the data emerging (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and that it was the researcher's judgement that decided what was included as a theme. Short extracts of coded data are included in Appendix 5. Ethical considerations relating to participant internal confidentiality precludes the possibility of a complete transcript being included, and the extracts in the appendix are from a range of participants.

The researcher immersed themself in the data, with initial analysis identifying codes within the data and this 'search for and identification of common threads', (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013, p 400) was an ongoing process throughout the period of data collection. The '*recursive* process' (sic) detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006, p 86), continued throughout all phases of data collection and analysis. Data was coded using thematic analysis which involves developing overarching themes from the data corpus and is appropriate for interpretivist research and research exploring the psychological beliefs, emotional experiences and social constructs of participants, (Saldana, 2013). As autism special schools have their own communities of practice, the researcher opined that this form of analysis may reveal some elements which were particular to these communities. The approach adopted to analysis for the current study was an inductive/deductive approach as the conceptual framework for the thesis had already been identified as emotional labour, but there was no

compulsion to adhere to this if a different conceptual theory was identified. The researcher conducted the interviews and transcribed the data, and therefore had some initial thoughts when commencing data analysis. The transcription of data included pauses, laughs and notes regarding gestures which were made at the time of the interviews. These were indicated in notes made by the interviewer at the time and recorded in transcripts in square brackets. The reading and thematic analysis of the complete data set allowed for an initial organisation of the data, with the researcher looking at prevalence of codes across the data set, whilst acknowledging that a higher percentage of a code did not necessarily indicate importance.

Initial coding was undertaken after five interviews had taken place, although the researcher had begun to identify some commonalities after the third interview, and these were noted down. The data was analysed line by line with words and phrases highlighted. Yellow was used to indicate emotion words and phrases, and blue where the researcher interpreted commonalities between the participant transcripts. Annotations were made in the margins as to potential codes, or a 'central organising concept' (Braun, Clarke and Hayfield, 2019, p 5). The final four interviews were analysed in a similar way, and a mind map for the initial stages of this process is shown in Figure 3.5 below, where it can be seen that initially, emotion words were allocated positive and negative connotations. At this point, the researcher was aware of the assertion that '..fluidity, contextual decision making and process of qualitative approaches' should be retained, (Braun, Clarke and Hayfield, 2019, p 3). Further these authors assert that their original six step approach to thematic analysis should not be used as a tick box exercise, but that the process of analysis should be described.

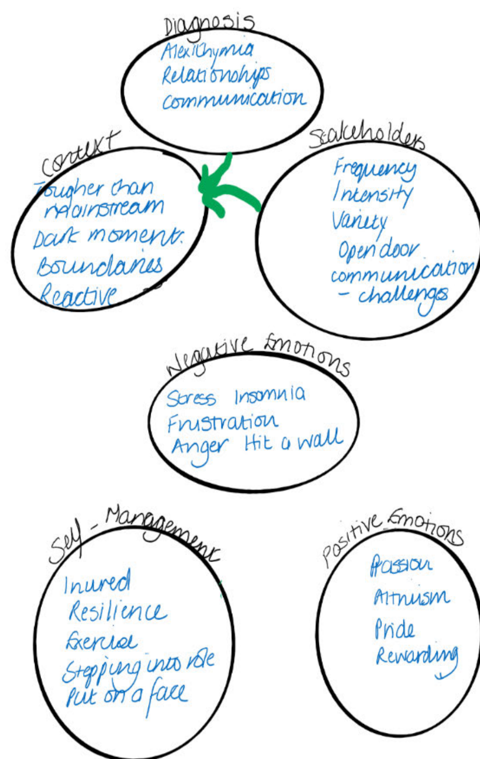

Figure 3.5 First Stage Data Analysis

The initial codes generated at this stage were identified as diagnosis, context, stakeholder, negative emotions, positive emotions and self-management, with the codes of stakeholders and context identified by the end of the third interview. Reflecting on the first stage data analysis codes, the researcher searched for themes within the codes in Figure 3.5. Emotional labour was identified as a main theme and was associated with participant negative emotions. The researcher associated participant positive emotions as a potential mitigating factor for negative emotions and therefore allocated a theme entitled restorative factors, against the negative emotions which contributed to emotional labour. At this point, the decision was made that two original stand-alone codes, diagnosis and stakeholders, were incorporated into a ‘contextual and environmental’ theme as the researcher opined that whilst highly relevant, they were nonetheless unique elements of the context and environments of the schools participating in the research. The code self-management was originally identified as a theme, but in reviewing the themes the researcher decided that due to the prominence of some words and phrases, a more appropriate theme would be ‘self-management and resilience building strategies’. The final four analytical themes and some of the key words/phrases coded during data analysis are shown in Figure 3.6 on page 71, and these are explored in Chapter 7. The

question of reflexivity should also be addressed at this point, with the researcher acknowledging that their own contextual information (background, education, culture and experiences) will have influenced their interpretation of the data and the subsequent themes identified, (Braun and Clarke, 2019b).

3.8 Researcher Positionality, Credibility, Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness

The positionality of a researcher impacts all aspects of the research process and before exploring the concepts of credibility, reliability, validity and trustworthiness it is apposite to detail the current researcher's positionality. The epistemological assumption of an interpretivist paradigm is that there are many realities and when undertaking research, the author's values, beliefs and experiences of the social world impact their interpretation of the data. Therefore, the findings in this study are an interpretation of the participants experiences based on the researcher's position as a previous senior leader of autism specific special schools who has a linguistic background. This linguistic background, the researcher acknowledges, may have influenced the decision regarding methods of data collection, whilst her previous experience may have allowed her to better relate to participants experiences. On reflection, it is accepted that the researcher's own experiences may have influenced 'all aspects and stages of the research process.' (Holmes, 2020, p 3)

One of the key issues with a social constructionist approach to research is that the data is contextual and a construct of both researcher and respondent, (Allen, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Scotland, 2012). This issue was addressed by Guba and Lincoln as far back as 1982, when they suggested that rather than truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality, features with which rationalistic inquiry was scrutinised, qualitative research should be interrogated regarding '… *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *confirmability*.' (sic) (p 246). Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that the validity of data in qualitative research may be provided through the depth, honesty, scope and richness of the data and the objectivity of the researcher. Although Morse et al., (2002) opined that reliability and validity should remain as strategies for qualitative research, it would appear that later authors have reverted back to the criteria defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994), which were reinforced by Shenton (2004) who provides examples of provision that researchers can make to address each criteria.

Explaining each of these criteria in turn, credibility is where the researcher must seek to ensure from the participants that the interpretations and analysis of the data is a true reflection of their reality. Creswell (2014, p 201) refers to this process as '…member checking..', which in the current study was achieved by sending participants interview transcripts for their confirmation of accuracy. Transferability may be possible under certain conditions, if sufficiently 'thick descriptions' are available (Guba and Lincoln, 1982), using purposive sampling and providing contextual information about the institutions involved allows for this. Dependability is described by Clisset (2008) as the replication of the research with similar participants in a similar context producing similar outcomes, although it should be acknowledged that a different researcher may have an alternative interpretation of the data with another outcome. Finally, confirmability refers to the extent that the research results reflect the data, and the possibility of tracking the findings back through the analytical process to the original data. Creswell (2014) asserts that the specificity of qualitative research is what provides value to the study. An additional element of confirmability is that of reflexivity (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p 248), whereby the researcher analyses their 'underlying epistemological assumptions' and any implicit biases they may have, acknowledges these and attempts to put them to one side during the research process.

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is addressed by Nowell et al., (2017, p 1) and Shenton (2004) with the former identifying the need for the research to be conducted in a 'rigorous and methodical manner to yield meaning and useful results'. It is further posited by Nowell et al., (2017, p 2), that researchers should provide clarity when describing data analysis methods to prevent difficulties for readers in 'evaluating the trustworthiness of the research'. This author recognises that there are limitations to the qualitative approach undertaken for this research and has endeavoured to provide the clarity discussed by Nowell et al., (2017) whilst concurring with the view of Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p 202) who state that 'readers will be able, ….., to generalize subjectively from the case in question to their own personal experiences.' Whilst the emotional management experiences described by the participants in this research study may not all be replicated by other school leaders in autism specific special schools, some of their experiences may resonate.

THEMES	EMOTIONAL LABOUR	CONTEXTUAL & ENVIRONMENTAL	SELF-MANAGEMENT & RESILIENCE BUILDING STRATEGIES	RESTORATIVE FACTORS
Codes	• Surges • Suppression • Frustration • Anger • Feeling nauseous • Crying • Overwhelming • Exhaustion • Loneliness • Panic • Fear • Apprehension • Hit a wall • Despair • Anxiety • Stress • Emotional sponge • Boundaries • Emotional melting pot • Measured emotions • Empathy • Insomnia • Holding in check • Breaking point • Emotional intelligence	• Stage fright • Tougher than mainstream • Exposure • Dark moments • Uncertainty/fragility • Reactive • Lack of time • Boundaries • Counselling • Staffing structure • Problem solving • CPD/support programmes • Frequency Sub Themes: DIAGNOSIS • Diagnosis • Alexithymia • Input/out in relationships • Student vulnerability • Communication challenges • Self-harm STAKEHOLDERS • Parental contact – frequency/intensity • Parental journey • Frequency of stakeholder contact • Open door • Stakeholder expectations • Communication challenges	• Becoming inured • Resilience • Fitness • External supports • Reflection • Mindfulness • Progression • Self-soothing • Time before responses • Collegial Support and Trust • Performing • Role preparation • Projection of self • Detachment • Toolbox of tricks	• Passion • Positivity • Pride • Exciting • Positive challenge • Humanity • Privilege • Fulfilment • Altruism • Gratefulness • Purpose • Achievements (students) • Progress • Frequency – daily/all the time

Figure 3.6 Final Analytical Themes

3.9 Research Ethics

Throughout this project, the researcher has adhered to the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018, p 5) and acknowledged the guidelines within this which are:

- responsibilities to participants;
- responsibilities to sponsors, clients and stakeholders in research;
- responsibilities to the community of educational researchers;
- responsibilities for publication and dissemination;
- responsibilities for researchers' wellbeing and development.

In the current research the points above were considered as follows:

- responsibility to participants – care was taken to prevent harm to participants and the researcher was reflexive about power relations between themself and participants, which is discussed in more detail below. Consent was requested from participants for them to take part in the research process and once granted, they were informed of the right to withdraw at any time, that pseudonyms would be used, that data would be stored securely on a password protected laptop and that they could contact the researcher at any time if they had any concerns regarding the research process. Participants were also given information regarding support systems that were available to them should they be required;
- responsibility to sponsors, clients and stakeholders in research – there were no sponsors for this research. However, it was paramount that the research did not impact on the clients, which in this case were students and parents, and to this end, the researcher remained in contact with the headteacher at each school to ensure that this remained the case. The headteachers at all three schools were stakeholders in the current study and they were kept fully informed as to the progress of the research;
- responsibility to the community of educational researchers – in the current study, the researcher was acutely aware of their responsibility within the field of research and the integrity that such research demands and has followed ethical guidelines throughout;
- responsibility for publication and dissemination – the researcher will disseminate the results of the current study to the headteachers of each of the participant schools as a

discussion point. It is a goal of the researcher to publish the findings of the research in academic and practitioner journals and at conferences;

- responsibilities for researchers' well-being and development – during the current study, the researcher was aware of the importance of maintaining their own well-being with support systems in place.

Additionally, the study has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. There are several ethical issues concerned with undertaking research involving individuals (Creswell, 2014; Fontana and Frey, 1994; Robson, 2011; Thomas, 2007). Consideration should be given, but not limited, to the following points:

- The conduct of the researcher;
- Avoidance of harm to any participants, whether physical or emotional;
- Anonymity, with the use of pseudonyms for all participants;
- The rights of the participants, including the right for withdrawal at any point during the research;
- Fully informed consent.

Participants need to feel safe to facilitate their inner thoughts and feelings, (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), particularly when taking part in research on emotion management. One of the key elements to enable the researcher and participants to talk about such a sensitive subject is trust, (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010), and this was built up over a period of weeks prior to the interview. For the participants in the two schools that the researcher is linked to, face to face discussions were had initially, describing the purpose of the research. Following this, the participants were sent the information and consent form (Appendix 1) with the pictogram, (Appendix 4) and two more face to face discussions were had, albeit that some were only a few minutes, based on Robson's guidance (2011), to ensure that the participant was comfortable with the upcoming interview. A similar process was conducted for those participants outside of the two schools, but contact was made via telephone. The researcher offered the participants the choice of time and location for their interview to enable them to feel at ease.

A salient point made by Scotland, (2012) is that the thicker the description provided by a participant, the greater the risk of losing anonymity. Being cognisant of this, and as an insider researcher at two of the schools taking part in the research, it was paramount for the participants to know that pseudonyms would be used so that they could not be identified. In the writing up of the research findings, information regarding each participant is scant to further protect their identity and, in some places, gender neutral pseudonyms are used. Transcribed interviews were stored on the researcher's personal computer which is password protected. Identifying details in Figure 3.1 (page 58) were changed to further protect participant identity. Creswell (2014, pp 93-94) provides a useful table outlining the various ethical issues that may be encountered with qualitative research and strategies to address the issues, and this author referred to that throughout the research process.

When conducting qualitative research, objective, value-free research is impossible. A reflection for the researcher is whether during the research there was an equal partnership between the researcher and the participants, or whether the researcher's values ultimately superseded (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005; Scotland, 2012). There are a few issues regarding power when conducting qualitative research as defined by Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) which include:

- The power relationship of the interview – it is the interviewer's knowledge, interest and research project which sets the rules for the interview;
- The dialogue itself which is one way – the interviewer asks the questions and the participant responds;
- The interview is a research tool – the interview is a means to an end for the researcher rather than a conversation per se, and the interpretation and reporting on the interview is guided by the researcher's interests;
- The interview may be manipulative – there is a possibility that the researcher will be guided by a hidden agenda;
- The researcher may monopolise the interpretation of the interview.

The power relationship between the researcher and some of the participants may have influenced the interactions, as the researcher is a senior leader across two of the schools. This relationship was uppermost in the researcher's mind when conducting interviews as the desire was for the participants to be open and honest about their experiences, rather than acquiesce or say what they thought the researcher wanted to hear. To facilitate this, when undertaking the face-to-face interviews with participants known to the researcher, the room used was one in which we had not previously met, and the researcher dressed in a more relaxed fashion than usual to ameliorate for the existent professional relationship. The researcher acknowledged throughout the data collection and analysis process that the power imbalance may have affected both the responses from participants, and what they chose not to disclose.

All the above factors were considered, and the relevant ethical paperwork was submitted to the university Ethics Committee in June of the first year of the project. Some amendments were required to the paperwork prior to ethical approval being granted. Following the initial pilot interview, and discussion with the researcher's supervisor, a pictogram was drawn up for the interviews for the remainder of the research, and this along with revised ethics paperwork was resubmitted to the Ethics Committee and approved in October of the first year of the project (Appendix 2).

The researcher was aware that talking about emotions and the impact of these is a sensitive subject and reflected on how to best support participants through this process. Discussions with the headteachers at participant schools identified that staff had free access to a counselling and support service, and the researcher was provided with details of these to remind participants of this. Time was factored into the interview schedule to allow for breaks during the individual interviews or for an interview to be suspended and re-convened at a later date if a participant so requested. Although some participants became emotionally upset during their interviews, none requested a halt to the process or to reschedule and after a brief pause, were able to continue.

3.9.1 Insider Research

As has been detailed above, insider research carries several ethical issues, but this researcher is aware that not all of these are covered by the ethics paperwork submitted to the Ethics Committee. The works of Floyd and Arthur (2012) and Tolich (2004) refer to an iceberg model, where the tip of the iceberg represents external confidentiality – the anonymity granted to participants, whilst the unseen section of the iceberg signifies internal confidentiality – where participants may be able to identify one another and where relationships may be ongoing at the end of the research process. Ongoing relationships post research was a key consideration for the researcher, which required the building of trust with participants within the researcher's organisation, some of whom requested reassurance that information disclosed was completely confidential. This reassurance was given with the caveat that any safeguarding issues would need to be disclosed.

A key phrase in Floyd and Arthur's paper (2012, p 174) is that 'Insiders cannot 'unhear' what they have been told' and this became relevant during this research process as one participant talked of their doubt in their ability to fulfil their role. Whilst this was of concern to the researcher, this information was given in confidence and was therefore not disclosed as at that point in the research, it was not deemed to be detrimental to the organisation (Drake, 2010; Sikes, 2006). In an attempt to ensure that the data from the individual interviews was co-owned between the researcher and the participants, transcribed interviews were sent to each participant so that they could clarify any misconceptions of the researcher (Floyd and Arthur, 2012; Sikes, 2006).

A pertinent point for this research is that of insider research and institutional anonymity, (Floyd and Arthur, 2012) as research published with the author's name precludes any perceived anonymity. The focus, they opine, should therefore be on the participants anonymity and this includes the ability for respondents to recognise one another. In mitigation of this point, this researcher was able to engage three senior leaders from three schools who all hold the same position, and in anonymising each participant, has endeavoured to maintain confidentiality. Initially, the table detailing the participants in the participants and context section of this chapter detailed each participant's previous role, but on reflection, the author realised that this may reveal the identity of those participants who

worked together. Despite this, the researcher recognises that anonymity of participants who work across the same organisation may be impaired (Tolich, 2004). As Sikes (2006, p. 105) states, 'All research endeavours have, at least potential, implications for any one touched in any way by them.', and this researcher regularly returned to the fact that the participants in the research were people with feelings and emotions, checking back with them post interview and transcription, to answer any questions that arose as a result of the research process.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed a study undertaken to address the research questions and consequently, to challenge current practice and thinking relating to the induction of school leaders at autism specific special schools. The study is based on an interpretivist approach, interviewing senior leaders in autism specific special school settings to gather and analyse their lived experiences of emotional labour. Reference is made to the ethical issues that are inherent in qualitative research, particularly when undertaking this as an insider researcher. The following chapter details the findings, using the words of research participants to give voice to their experiences.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

At the core of the research questions of this unique research project was the exploration of the emotional labour experiences of senior leaders in autism specific special schools, what strategies they used to manage this daily emotional labour and how they attempted to build emotional resilience. There is a distinct lack of research into this area, as identified in the Literature Review and the findings of this research project will fill a gap in the existing literature. Closely aligned to this, as an objective of the research, was the enquiry as to what training and support the participants had received on joining an autism specific special school, and what training and support they would recommend for others in the future based on their personal experience. The findings of this interpretivist research are presented in three chapters, giving examples from the data in support of the analytical process and results. The chapters follow the overarching headings from Figure 3.6, page 71.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the participants in this study were all senior leaders in autism specific special schools. The schools who agreed to take part in the research were all day schools in the south of England, supporting students with a diagnosis of high functioning autism or Asperger syndrome. Sensitivity has been exercised presenting the findings in this chapter, since this study implicates students and their parents, staff and senior leaders who are all part of a small community. However, examples of raw data are provided in the form of verbatim quotes to support the researcher's analysis and to give voice to each participant's experiences and strength of feelings as expressed during the individual interviews. Some of these quotes are lengthy, but this is deliberate as it assists the reader by providing the context and illuminates the experience within which the words were spoken, without breaching the confidentiality issues referred to above. The participants were provided with a pictogram prior to the interview as a visual point of reference for the question regarding interactions with a range of stakeholders (Figure 3.3, page 64). Each interview concluded by asking the participant if there was anything additional that they would like to say.

Themes identified from the analysis of the data (Figure 3.6, page 71), have been used to organise the three Findings chapters: emotional labour, (section 4.2) contextual and environmental, (Chapter 5) and self-management and resilience building strategies (Chapter 6) incorporating restorative factors (Section 6.7), which are elements participants reported mitigating for the daily emotional labour experienced. The conclusion (Section 6.8) reviews the findings of all three chapters, extracting pertinent points for discussion in Chapter 7.

This chapter explores the participants experiences of emotional labour as leaders of autism specific special schools. Prevalence and awareness of emotional labour are explored in section 4.2.2. Section 4.2.3 considers emotional labour within the senior leadership teams at participant schools, with participant voice being noted in section 4.2.4. The cumulative impacts of these factors are noted in section 4.3, addressing Research Question 1:

> *What are the experiences and perceptions of emotional labour for school leaders working in autism specific special schools?*

Following on from this, Chapter 5, Contextual and Environmental. records the participants perceptions of how the unique environment in which they work impacts on their emotional labour. The chapter is divided into sections which explore the environment (5.2), student diagnoses (5.2.1), the size of leadership teams at the participant schools (5.2.2), the range of stakeholders with which the participants interacted (5.2.3) and the professional development and support that they received as part of their induction (5.2.4). The chapter concludes by detailing the impacts of these combined factors on the emotional labour of the participants (section 5.3). The sections in Chapter 5 address Research Question 2:

> *What contextual and environmental factors in an autism specific special school further impact on school leaders emotional labour?*

The subsequent findings chapter, Chapter 6, studies the strategies that the participants adopted to manage the reported daily emotional labour. Section 6.2 explores surface acting,

and this is followed by Section 6.3 which notes how participants engaged in deep acting. Emotional absorption is described in Section 6.4, with self-management and resilience building strategies included in Section 6.5. The subsequent section, 6.6, details the impacts of strategies for managing emotional labour. Restorative factors noted by participants which they posit mitigated for the daily emotional labour they were exposed to are reported in section 6.7. These sections combine to address Research Question 3:

> *What strategies do leaders of schools for children with autism employ for the management of their emotional labour and how do they build emotional resilience?*

The impacts of restorative factors are considered in section 6.8 and the conclusion of Chapter 6 (Section 6.9) reviews the findings of all three chapters, extracting pertinent points for discussion in Chapter 7.

4.2 Emotional Labour

4.2.1 Introduction

The following sections detail participant perceptions of the emotional labour that they engaged in, including the prevalence of this, their awareness of the emotional labour used, and the impacts of this on their job satisfaction and overall wellbeing.

4.2.2 Prevalence and Awareness

The initial interview question garnered a range of responses, but the common theme from all participants was that they engaged in emotion work on a daily basis: '*Every single day, I would say it's the biggest proportion of my work, I'd say that if it's not parents, then it's staff and managing between the two of them.* (Mandy). Mandy went on to say that she recognised that much of her day was spent '*managing the friction that is being caused by things not being done, people's anxieties which then leads to their behaviours in a different way and how we manage ourselves and our emotions in that context'.* Charlie, Heidi and Brian also

reported that they engaged in emotion work on a daily basis: '*Oh goodness,* [pause], *daily, every day, whether with staff, students or parents. I would say ….. you can't work effectively with anyone if you are not managing your emotions.*' (Charlie); *'It's an everyday occurrence'.* (Heidi); *'If I'm honest, every day in one way or another'.* (Brian). Ally considered this question for a few moments before responding with: *'Oh every day, and um, I mean obviously to a different extent … but to some extent every day.'.* Pat and Kath used the word constant: '*It's constant, all the time'* (Pat), '*Constantly, every day*' (Kath), whilst Anna compared her current experience to mainstream: '*Daily – it's the biggest part of it, isn't it, that emotional regulation'* (Anna). She went on to say: '*… here it's the fact that it's every day, it's every day, whereas in mainstream you might easily have a day, or even a week whereby you're not involved in any emotional work.'*

Such high prevalence rates amongst participants were unexpected, with all participants indicating that they engaged in emotional labour on a daily basis. It was surprising that both Mandy and Anna referred to emotional labour as the biggest proportion of their daily work.

Interestingly, participants awareness of the prevalence of emotional labour prior to the interviews appeared to vary considerably. This is illustrated in the following excerpts from the data. Beginning with Heidi, there was a suggestion that she was not always aware when she was monitoring her emotional responses:

> *I don't know that I'm fully aware when I am doing it, but on reflection, yes, it happens every day – not always with the same people, but that managing my initial emotional response to situations is a large part of my role.*
>
> Heidi

The above quote seems to infer that Heidi's management of her emotional responses was undertaken largely subconsciously and had perhaps become an automatic response to certain situations without her having to cognitively decide to respond in a particular manner. One other participant recognised this subconscious emotional management, which may be due to

the length of time that both participants had worked in autism specific environments enabling them to respond in this way.

Heidi's seemingly subconscious management of her emotional responses was similar to that of Pat, who has worked in the field of autism for most of her career and suggested that she had become inured to the emotional labour associated with her role, only to re-consider it during the interview:

> *It's funny, you know, when I first came into this field, I used to become overwhelmed with so many emotions* [long pause], *often frustration and a feeling of helplessness, loneliness, despair* [pause], *but then I think I became inured to it, I found ways to manage the emotional tsunamis. I hadn't thought about it for a while but it's still there, that emotional load, every day.*

Pat's recollections about her initial experiences suggested that she may have found it difficult to manage the many and varied emotional demands of her role. It was difficult during the interview to ascertain whether the long pause gave her time to find the appropriate vocabulary or whether it was a moment where she was recalling the emotions as felt. The words following the initial pause seemed to convey a feeling of desperation, which, it would appear, she had overcome in the intervening years. Alternatively, Pat may have, unknowingly, developed a strategy for deflecting criticism and negativity or subconsciously compartmentalised her work self, suppressing or modulating her emotions when necessary to allow her to focus on her role.

By contrast with Heidi and Pat, other participants seemed to be acutely aware of the emotional labour exerted in their work and gave examples of situations they had dealt with and how they had felt during or after the event. For example, Anna gave an example of supporting two students (J and R) who had experienced a communication breakdown. Anna referred to how emotionally exhausting it was to monitor the careful use of language with these students, and the amount of time that was required to support their heightened emotions: *'When I think about how we got J and R to the positions that we did, that was*

hours, me and Jenny spent hours and hours and hours talking and counselling them and emotionally, that's exhausting'.

4.2.3 Emotional Labour within Senior Leadership Teams

An interesting and unexpected facet of emotional labour suggested by some participants was that they engaged in emotion management with their peers on the schools Leadership Teams, and for some, this was reported as a major element of their emotional labour.

Mandy provided an example of the emotional labour that she engaged in which she opined was due to her colleague's lack of resilience: *'I think personally I'm fairly resilient, but,* [long pause]*, there are days when it just gets overwhelming.'* Mandy's long pause in this quote may have provided her the time to find the vocabulary she needed to accurately portray the emotional labour she experienced. She went on to talk about the resilience of her peers: '*I don't want to be pulled down because I'm having to deal with their lack of resilience and their emotional issues'.* The consequences of her team's lack of resilience on her emotional well-being appeared to be of concern to Mandy.

Trying to maintain a balance within the senior leadership team was referred to by a number of participants when talking about colleagues and the impacts that this had on their emotional labour: '*Maybe I need to be more robust with the person above than sometimes I am. But, managing that person's reaction and the impact on my emotion is a concern, you know, because it's a fragile balance.*' (Anna). The concern to which Anna referred was a situation that it would appear she had still not found a solution to, with her experiencing an ongoing emotional impact from her colleague. Charlie referred to carrying an *'emotional burden'* when working with the senior leaders at her school, which was going through a transitional phase, potentially likening her experience to carrying the load of all the senior leaders. She articulated that: '*I guess it was just fortunate that it came at the end of an academic year, so I had the summer to recalibrate'*. Charlie went on to say that if she had not had the summer to *'recalibrate',* then she would either have left the school through choice or been signed off

with stress. She was, however, keen to articulate that throughout this period, *'no-one would have known how much I was struggling – I kept that buried'*.

4.2.4 Participant Voices and Loneliness

For some participants, the lack of opportunity to talk through their emotional labour experiences appeared to compound the impact of their labour, and some participants talked of the loneliness they experienced.

Although Kath reported focusing on her role whilst in school, she highlighted the lack of opportunity for discussion regarding her experience of emotional labour. She recalled an incident with a parent, likening her experience to not having a voice:

> *It's that passive part that I don't have a voice. I want to write to the newspaper about this woman and this is what she did. This horrible person did this to me. Or do you know how much you upset me. It's having no voice.*
>
> Kath

This is a crucial point to note as at this this point in the interview, Kath aligned the lack of voice to her feeling of isolation and loneliness '*it's lonely when you're dealing with this on your own'*. The loneliness that Kath described was also referred to by Mandy, who when talking about her responsibilities suggested that: '*.... you can feel very alone ... lots of staff I think don't realise, so that's where it's alone ....'*. However, for Kath it was not only in the work environment where loneliness and a lack of voice affected her. She recalled that her family were not interested when she related issues that had arisen at work and stated: '*you almost feel like you don't have a voice because you've got no-one to talk to about it. It gets very lonely'*.

Although no other participants raised the lack of voice in such plain terms, it was intimated by both Mandy and Brian when asked at the end of the interview if there was anything that

they wanted to add: '*Can I just say this has been really cathartic for me, you know,* [pause], *I don't have the opportunity to reflect like this usually, it's been good to talk about it.*' (Mandy); '*No, actually yes,* [pause], *it's been kind of cathartic to do this. It really would help to be able to do it on a more regular basis .....'* (Brian). It would appear that the interviews for this research project were the first opportunity that the participants had to talk about their experiences of senior leadership and emotion work.

As can be seen from the above quotes, participant senior leaders in the autism specific special schools in this research engaged in daily emotion work, and this point was echoed amongst all participants. A number of participants articulated that they felt the emotions that they were exposed to and their management of these were part of their job: *' ... that's what it's all about, that's what you're being paid for, so yes, there's an acceptance there. That's what I'm being paid for, to take the emotions and abuse, and not bite back*' (Kath). It is of note that Kath used the word *'abuse'* alongside the emotions that she faced perhaps reflecting some specific experiences which remained prevalent to her. Acknowledging that emotional labour was a key element of her role, Mandy suggested: '*You've really got to want to do it, because of the toll it takes, emotionally, physically, it's exhausting, but then that's why I get paid what I do*'; to which Heidi concurred: *'... it's an almost daily struggle against the tide of emotions that I encounter and how I manage that to ensure that I am still able to do the job for which I am paid*'.

All participants had been able to interpret the emotional labour that they experienced although some were more acutely aware of it than others and some appeared to accept it as an intrinsic element of their role. This appeared to normalise their experience and may have resulted in their emotional labour becoming a facet of their role that was not spoken about, either during their induction or within their leadership teams. The resultant impacts of this emotional labour are explored in the next section.

4.3 Impacts of Emotional Labour

The impacts on the research participants of the emotional labour undertaken was a recurring theme and for some, resulted in consideration of their ongoing role within their organisation.

Others, whilst not articulating thoughts of leaving their role, talked about the impacts of emotional labour, and it would appear that these emotions were still raw in some cases and that the dissonance between emotions as felt and emotions as displayed led to emotional exhaustion. During this section of the interviews, some participants became tearful, and it was necessary to stop for a few minutes for them to regain their composure and continue with the interviews. None opted to suspend the interview, although this option was offered: *'.. I can remember when my stress levels got really high here to a point, because I ended up in a supervision with Amy, crying, thinking, I can't do this anymore ...*' (Ally). Ally recalled that this reflected a particularly difficult stage in her career and from this experience, she recognised that she needed to *'keep checking with myself that I'm OK and I am managing'.* Anna also referred to crying, but rather than being in response to a significant event, it seemed that she used this as an emotional release: ' *... I'll do it in my own way, you know, and usually that involves having a good cry. I'm not a shouter, I'm not a screamer, I'll just go and have a little cry.'* (Anna).

For Heidi, it was during periods of reflection and talking through specific events that she reported becoming emotionally upset: '*I don't always recognise when I am emotionally impacted by situations or issues that arise, but there are times when I need to talk things through and find myself becoming tearful'*. Heidi continued by describing a critical event that had happened at the school and how she had not registered the emotional impact of this until: *'I was writing an incident review for Governors and then it all came flooding back and I couldn't stop crying .... I've realised that those emotions are often bubbling just under the surface, but in my role, I can't display them'.* Pat reported a similar response, and whilst not indicating that she became tearful, found that sometimes, her emotional reactions were so strong that: ' *... it kind of catches you off guard, and for me those are the most difficult times .. I guess my thinking brain is overwhelmed by the emotions I'm experiencing, and I struggle to manage my reactions'*.

Some participants explained that the greatest impacts of emotional labour were experienced after challenging encounters with parents, and the emotional hurt was palpable during the interviews of both Mandy and Kath: '*When I got home that night, I just cried – never done that before – and every time I saw her after, I felt sick to my stomach.*' (Mandy). Mandy's

ongoing physical experience when encountering the parent in question potentially indicated that she was unable to rationalise her emotional reaction to the initial highly charged emotional encounter. Kath recounted her experience of a traumatic interaction with a parent and the impact of it; '*It really, really upset me... I want to go there where nothing's ever going to happen to me, where these people can't hurt me, and they can't follow me.*' (Kath). The need that Kath spoke about to hide from the individuals that had caused her such distress seemed to still be prevalent for her and she went on to say: *'I think a lot of my emotions come from fear if I'm being totally honest.'* This is an important point as it would appear that the original interaction had impacted so significantly on Kath that she was still fearful of a similar situation arising.

Acknowledging that portraying a calm persona was a key part of their role, some participants masked the impacts of emotional labour by withdrawing: *'I've realised that I can't make everything right, and although I get frustrated, at those times I step away for a while, close the door'* (Elodie); Referring to a situation where she had been suddenly asked to chair a meeting that she was not prepared for, Anna stated: *'Being walked into a situation that I'm not prepared for makes me angry, I'll be honest with you, but I just shut the office door for a while'.* However, sometimes leaders did not recognise the emotional impact on themselves until it was brought to their attention. Pat referred to an incident where a member of staff had reported a student to the police for assault. Whilst much detail was given in the interview, for reasons of anonymity, the researcher is only using a quote relating to the emotional impact of this incident on Pat.

> *It kind of broke me for a bit, I felt responsible for employing this member of staff who eventually, for whatever obscure reason, felt that they needed this student to be punished in some way. A whole range of emotions, for weeks really ….. and it wasn't until my partner pointed out that I was disappearing down a rabbit hole that I realised.*

This is a salient point as it would appear that had Pat's partner not brought her emotional state to her attention, it may have significantly impacted her emotional wellbeing.

The quotes above demonstrate that for some participants, particular events resulted in them feeling wounded, although they had different strategies for dealing with this wounding. For Kath the pain and upset was still very relevant, despite the incidents happening over a year ago. On a few occasions, Kath referred to incidents which were '*frightening*' or where she felt '*fair game*', which may have indicated that she may not fully have absorbed a strategy that supported her when such wounding happens.

It was evident from participant responses that they were impacted by the prevalence and intensity of their emotional labour. There were several contributing factors which participants opined resulted in these high prevalence and emotion labour experiences and these will be explored in the next Chapter.

5.1 Findings – Contextual and Environmental

5.1.2 Introduction

This section of the chapter explores the contextual and environmental factors that participants suggested impacted on the emotional labour associated with their role. Section 5.2 details elements articulated by participants in the general school environment, with section 5.2.1 reporting on their views regarding diagnosis. Stakeholder interactions are discussed in section 5.2.2, followed by continuing professional development and support in 5.2.3. The chapter concludes in section 5.3 by looking at the impact of these combined contextual and environmental factors.

5.2 Environment

Many participants talked about the impact of the environment on their emotional labour, and this section records their thoughts on this. When talking about the general school environment, Elodie gave an example of the open-door policy at her school and the reactivity of the work involved and how emotionally exhausting she found this: ' *.... so much of the work that we do constantly is reactive no matter how much you plan, you're reacting to situations the whole time, and that is emotionally exhausting ...'*. She went on to explain:

> *We have an open door policy and the students can actually come in and speak to us at any point throughout the day, you can't really be prepared for what they're going to come with so you really do have to stop and think about it and think about the amount of emotion that you apply to it as well.*
>
> Elodie

An open door policy was also seen as an environmental consideration by Heidi, who recalled how some parents seemed to struggle with understanding that they could not just walk in to her office at any time to see her: *'I know we have an open door policy, but why can't they understand that I'm not sitting here waiting for them to walk through the door and share their problems'*.

For Mandy, it was not the open-door policy of her environment which had the greatest impact, but her opinion was that some of the staff may have joined the school thinking that it would be a less pressurised environment than mainstream:

> *I think some who have burnt out from mainstream, or might have been moved on, think again 'I'll do this as an easier route' and realise actually that it's tougher than mainstream. I think here it's tougher because I have to manage their emotions for them, give them strategies, massage them. So, most of the time, I explain this to them* [pause] *when I'm in a good place myself I'll explain this to them, but other times, well, I just tell them, you're the adult and that's the child.*

During the interview, Mandy's final sentence above seemed to convey an element of frustration as her tone of voice changed at this point. It is possible that, when trying to support staff working with students, she had not yet found an effective strategy to manage any resultant frustration.

Other participants indicated that both staff and parents were contextual and environmental factors which influenced their emotional labour. The discourse used by many participants when describing interaction with these groups included the concept of boundaries, expressing how the senior leaders attempted to manage the emotional impact on their day to day work.

A number of participants spoke about boundaries in the context of staff: *'..... but I'm going to let you have your little rant, again, then we're going to find out what the real problems are and we're going to move on from this, I'm not stepping in again.'* (Anna). When talking about corridor conversations with staff who appeared down beat, Charlie stated: ' ... *you just switch into upbeat conversation mode, because you don't want to join them in that emotion, you know, when individuals mirror emotions – well I wasn't having any of that, I was just holding my boundaries.* She went on to explain how she thought that staff respected her for maintaining her boundaries when a member of staff was not following the agreed school

protocols: ' .. *I think the other staff respected me for it, they knew that I wouldn't stand for any lame excuses*'. Charlie also talked about the need for senior leaders to hold to their boundaries when staff were trying to offload to them: '*So, they offload on the senior leaders and their job's done, but it's how we push back and keep our boundaries, I reflect a lot on that. It seems to be something that is particular to this type of environment'.* Heidi voiced concern as to whether the boundaries that her senior leadership team had in place with regards to supporting staff with student behaviour needed revisiting: ' *... so we do have boundaries, but I do wonder sometimes if those boundaries are in the right place or whether they need shifting a bit.'*

The issue of senior leaders keeping their boundaries with other staff was an environmental area of concern for Mandy and one that she implied they should know without her having to tell them:

> *And setting their boundaries with staff, I mean, Fran is very pally with Malcolm, they go drinking, they meet up, she went to his wedding, but actually, once you're in SLT, you cannot favour one member of staff over another, it just doesn't work, it doesn't work at all.*

The need for boundaries when meeting with parents was alluded to by Anna, suggesting that the holding of boundaries was required alongside being empathetic: '*I think in a parent meeting, you can umm, you can be incredibly empathetic, but also you have to be very, very firm as well'.* Anna went on to explain that the number of meetings with parents was greater in her current school than in her previous mainstream environment for which she needed to emotionally prepare: *'There are so many more meetings with parents in this type of environment and it does have an impact'.*

A completely different aspect of boundaries was referred to by Mandy when speaking about a parent who, in her opinion, had no boundaries: '*You just have to psych yourself up before you speak to her because you know whatever you say or do is not right, and she doesn't have any boundaries about what she says or where she says it.*'. A similar situation was recounted by

Kath, when talking about a complaint from a parent where, on reflection, she wondered why she had not put some boundaries in place:

> *Why is it that I go through the crisis, deal with it, and then afterwards, I sit there and think 'Why did I put up with that, why did I put up with being spoken to like that?.' I think that's the passiveness in me that is awful.'*

Kath seemed genuinely perplexed as this stage in the interview as to why she was unable to implement any boundaries during a crisis, but on reflection posited that it may be due to the specific environment: *'I know I should do it more but in this environment, sometimes the crises come one after the other and I just get overwhelmed'.*

An additional contextual and environmental factor which participants suggested impacted on the prevalence and levels of emotional labour experienced was the size of the management team at the three schools taking part in the research. In terms of management structure, the autism specific special schools in this research mirrored that in many primary schools, having a Senior Leadership Team but no tier of middle management. Brian articulated his experiences of being always accessible when he first joined an autism specific special school from a mainstream environment:

> *It was a shock, I hadn't realised that in such a small school everything lands at your door. In mainstream, I was on the SMT so below me I had Heads of Department ....., and above me was SLT, most issues kind of jumped my tier of management. .....I really was completely unprepared for the volume of direct face to face interaction that came my way, parents, staff, students, I wasn't sure at the time I could survive it, but I have and I'm proud of myself for still being here*

The shock that Brian described appeared to have a huge impact on him, as is evidenced towards the end of the above quote when he talks about his ability to *'survive',* which could imply that he feared that he would not succeed in his role.

The structure of the leadership team at autism specific special schools was referred to by a number of participants, who referred to their role in supporting students who were struggling to manage their emotions. When talking about how intensely she worked with a particular student who was experiencing periods of freezing and being unable to move, one participant suggested: '*I think the issue is that many staff can't do that though, and it always ends up coming to the top tier in a small school like this'* (Charlie). This suggestion was supported by Pat when she referred to teachers being needed in the classrooms so that: '*In a small school like this, we don't have the levels of management or staff who are not working in direct contact with students, so it all comes to the leadership team'*. Mandy referred to student behaviour, and suggested that the staff were in the habit of referring this up to the Senior Leadership Team rather than dealing with it themselves:

> *When it comes to behaviour, it shouldn't be the Head or the Director that they come to because a student has called them a name today or because they've done this or that, that should be the class teacher, being able to say this was not acceptable, rather than it going straight up and then we have to bat it back down …*

When referring to the *'emotional work'* that she engaged in Anna explained that: *'I think here, because I manage probably 90% of the staff, that's probably the difference. There isn't a tier of management below to take some of the responsibility.'*

Ally described how, even though her school aimed to have a certain amount of predictability in the day to day operations as this approach best supported the students' requirement for routine, on occasions, things happened that threw this predictability. When probed further, she explained that even with parents that her school had a close relationship with: *'... sometimes you get some that sort of throw a curve ball and you think 'Where did that come from? I wasn't expecting that from that parent'*, and how that could then impact on the senior staff dealing with the issue raised, as again, in a school with a small leadership team it was them that dealt with these curve balls: *'... because there's not another tier there, it all comes to SLT'*.

During a particularly difficult period in her school's development, Kath recalled a few months where both parents and local authorities were identifying issues with her school and stated: *'With such a limited management structure, all complaints come straight to the top and at that time I felt overwhelmed by them'*.

There were positives and negatives of a small team noted by Heidi when relating her teams face to face interactions with students: *'….. pros and cons really, as an SLT we are a strong team so that we support each other at times like this, but we're a small team, so the risk of burnout it always there.'*

As can be seen from the above, the general environment within an autism specific special school can impact on the emotion work that senior leaders engage in on a regular basis, with the dichotomy between an open door policy and the need for boundaries, plus the size of the leadership teams and the practice of a hands on approach being key points. From the data analysis, two further sub themes of the contextual and environmental factors were identified and the first of these, diagnosis, is explored below.

5.2.1 Diagnosis

It is suggested that senior leaders in autism specific special schools are the recipients of a range of emotions due to the complexities of student diagnoses, including emotional regulation difficulties which are frequently similar to those displayed by much younger children. The participants widely recognised that the students' alexithymia required ongoing sensitive support from them, and was posited as an element of the autism diagnosis that contributed to much of the emotion work that Charlie, Pat and Heidi engaged in.

> *Most of the emotion work that I engage in is around supporting students, because their diagnosis means that many of them do not understand their emotions, their*

responses to events during the day or from the previous day that they have perseverated[2] *on.*

Charlie

Pat referred to the alexithymia that students with autism experience and how the management of emotions was often an EHCP outcome.

It just takes so much longer with our students, that emotional recognition and regulation. I know that most of our students, on their EHCP, an outcome is to recognise and have strategies for managing their emotions, and that takes a lot of work, work that tends to be done by the school leaders…'

Alexithymia was re-iterated by Heidi as a key aspect of supporting students.

There's not a day goes by when I don't support students in managing their emotions – it's one of their key difficulties, because often they have no concept of what has caused the change in their emotion and how to manage that

Heidi

Heidi went on to explain what she referred to as a '*double whammy'* that senior leaders at autism specific special schools experience:

That's the difference between the students and school leaders at schools like this one – the students' emotions overtake them and we manage that for them, whereas the leaders' jobs are to manage their own emotions so that they don't spill out – it's kind of a double whammy isn't it – two for the price of one (laughs)

[2] Perseverate is a term used when describing the rumination that some autistic individuals display regarding previous incidents or comments

It was difficult to ascertain whether Heidi's laughter conveyed irony or whether humour was used as a device for helping her manage the emotional labour that she referred to in this quote.

Research suggests (Blatcher et al., 2014), that within a classroom environment, students with an autism diagnosis are less successful than their neurotypical peers in positive relationship building with their teachers. This was supported in the current research project when Elodie recalled the intensive work that she had undertaken with a student and how, after one incident, the relationship broke down and she was unable to rebuild it:

> *I was working so intensely with this student, potentially too intensely, and the student was very reliant on me…… I just got to the stage where I could talk around anything and then one day, it's probably just the way I was feeling on that day, I was trying to talk around, talk around, and I just couldn't move her on from this situation and so I almost like, hands up, yep, OK you can go home. After that, the relationship was fractured and whatever I did, I couldn't repair it.*

It appears that in this instance, Elodie had become too empathetic with the student, which had impaired her ability to be objective about the work that she was doing with the individual, with the emotional attachment which she perceived existed being severed.

One aspect that was highlighted by a number of participants was that staff sometimes forgot the students' diagnosis and as a result, their expectations of student responses was unrealistic. Elodie explained this:

> *They're like, he was fine at break time chatting to that student, and then they all of a sudden can't come into my lesson – and then I have to explain that from a social interaction perspective they are two completely different things, and I don't always feel that is recognised. They forget that the ability to generalise across environments is one of the core deficits in autism.*

The vulnerability of students linked to their diagnosis and the impact that this has on the day to day interactions with students and staff was described by Mandy, who felt that staff did not appreciate the issues arising from this:

> *I feel I have to give more to our students, a) because they are more vulnerable and b) because of the way they interact and see themselves, I think there's a higher level of patience required and a different way of thinking because they are not so streetwise. Just because they're 17 they're not always at an equivalent age and therefore you're thinking, right, what language do I need to use for an 11 year old, what approach do I need to use for a much younger person, so I think you're giving more in that sense and I think you are dealing with staff who forget that. And there come the issues.*

This was supported by Brian who, when referring to the ongoing training available at his school, was surprised at the lack of strategies that staff utilised to support students who were struggling to manage their behaviour: '*I think they just forget the diagnosis, because the students generally manage well on most days, behaviour outbursts are rare, and then when they come, I don't know who to manage first, the student or the staff'*. There was a levity in Brian's voice at this point, but like Heidi, it was difficult to ascertain whether humour was being used as an emotional management tool or whether Brian's comment was ironic.

Both Ally and Charlie also referred to staff's lack of understanding of student behaviour linked to their diagnosis: *'.. it's staff seeing the final behaviour as opposed to seeing all of the subtle triggers that have already happened to make that student get to the point where they're being challenging or something's not working….*' (Ally). Charlie gave the example of when she was working with a student who was struggling with their mental health:

> *I just couldn't understand how you could work in a school like this and not understand that this student's behaviour wasn't wilful in any way, shape or form, but that they had a complex diagnosis, with a background of trauma, and their mental*

> *health was on a downward spiral. How can you not empathise with someone with that life experience?*

An interesting point regarding diagnosis was raised by Ally, who spoke about the changing cohort at her school, which now had a more cognitively and verbally able group of students, and how staff seemed to remember the autism diagnosis more readily when the student group presented differently.

> *And I think in a way, when our cohort was slightly different here, um, when we had the students that, um, were much more obviously autistic, they were more challenging in a way but actually, at the same time, the staff did treat them differently, with more empathy about their diagnosis*.

The question regarding diagnosis also had an impact on the dynamics of the student cohort in Charlie's school, which had an intake of students with a different profile to those already attending the school, consequentially, affecting her emotion work:

> *.. I wasn't on the Admissions Panel then so I don't know why we took them, they really weren't right, and I had to put a cap on my anger then, because I could see the effect they were having on the other kids, you know, it just wasn't right.*

In autism specific special schools, it is acknowledged that the social parameters relating to staff/student relationships and interaction are not intrinsically recognised by students, and this lack of reciprocal communication and relationship building was commented on by participants. Mandy explained that, in her opinion this impacted on whether staff members were able to manage the lack of relationship*:* '*I think there is more connectivity in mainstream with students and you don't get that so much here ….. There's never going to be anything coming back'.* She went on to explain that in her view, staff who did not understand this lack of reciprocal relationships found their role more challenging.

> *… our students require so much more input, but give themselves so little output in terms of emotions and gratitude and different things, and I think unless you can cope with the fact that you are not going to get that interaction all of the time, I think for some of our staff they find that not easy.*
>
> Mandy

This point was reiterated by Heidi who suggested: *'Our kids aren't easy to work with, generally they don't build relationships with you, they struggle to manage their emotions and need staff to help them do this, they don't understand hierarchy a lot of the time…'*

Brian gave an example of the time that he spent building what he perceived was a good relationship with a student, and how quickly this broke down following a comment he made:

> *I spent a huge amount of time getting to know him – his likes and dislikes, his motivators, you know, the general stuff. I thought I had a good understanding of him after three months, he was generally doing OK, and then I made a comment – you know, I can't even remember what it was, but something like 'don't be daft' – and that was it – he just shut down completely and didn't respond to me for weeks and weeks.*

Exploring relationships with students further with Brian he posited that the diagnosis and the complexities associated with this contributed to the fragility of these relationships.

> *I just wonder if there is something about the autism diagnosis that leaves staff feeling deskilled. Perhaps it's the unpredictability, or the fact that something that we think is totally insignificant can be the trigger for a major behaviour,* [pause], *yes, and then that student will perseverate on it and the relationship, or what fragile semblance of a relationship there was, has broken down completely.'*

The complexity of relationships with students was recognised by participants as an area that impacted on their emotional labour, and despite all those interviewed having worked with

students with an autism diagnosis for over two years, this remained an area that they all described as having an impact on their emotion management.

This relational complexity was highlighted by comments from Mandy and Pat who talked about the difference between mainstream students and students at autism specific special schools when they transitioned on to their next placement, voicing their surprise at the lack of goodbyes:

> *…. even after all these years, I do find it odd that you think you've got a great relationship with a student and their family and then on their last day at school when they're transitioning on to their adult placement they just walk out the door, don't say goodbye or thanks …*
>
> Pat

> *… it's not gratitude or thanks I guess, but you know when they leave, at the end of school, um, in mainstream, there's a different feel, than here, you know, our kids just go, walk out the door, you just have to accept that you're dead now to them, that's done, move on and there's no thanks or gratitude or hugs, or any of that, it's 'I've got it, I'm going'*
>
> Mandy

As can be seen from the quotes above, the participants perceptions were that there was a qualitative difference between the relationships that they built with students in mainstream schools to those that they built with students in autism specific special schools, with a resultant impact on their emotional labour.

Charlie raised some elements regarding diagnosis in relation to parents. The researcher spent some time deciding whether these should come under the sub-theme of stakeholders or be in

this section on diagnosis. The decision was made to include the quote in this section as it relates specifically to the genetic links in autism.

> *I think in an ASD specific school, because of the genetic links, we have so many more parents on the spectrum – many of them undiagnosed, especially when you think about the late diagnosis for women – so we're having to deal with parents in a similar way to students and it's not until you're in this environment that you realise the impact of this.*

A similar point was raised by Pat:

> *…it's widely recognised that many parents in our type of school are on the spectrum, whether diagnosed or not, so it's like working with an adult version of our kids, and sometimes, they are just as unpredictable in their responses.* [pause] *But to me, it seems it's almost taboo to talk about it, but in my experience, it's one of the most difficult aspects of the job and one that prospective leaders should be better prepared for.*

This subject of parental interactions and how leaders of autism specific special schools talk about this honestly is a highly relevant, sensitive issue and will be explored further in the Discussion chapter.

A more recently recognised facet of an autism diagnosis is that of associated anxiety disorders, including social anxiety and specific phobias which individuals with autism often experience, impacting on their mental health. This was evidenced by participants responses when talking about diagnoses, some of which are reported below. The diagnostic complexity of the students was raised by Charlie, who opined that other professionals struggled to understand that for many students, the mental health issues were an intrinsic element of the students' diagnosis: '*Sometimes just because they don't really understand our students, the*

complexities, especially where there are mental health issues. They want to treat the mental health separately from the autism, and you just can't do that ....'

A few feelings came to mind for Elodie when she was talking about student diagnosis:

> *…trust, fear, there's so many different things, ... and then of course the self-harm. Yeah, that's the one that really affects everyone emotionally, and there's always that underlying fear of, umm, did I say or do something that triggered that? So many different emotions with the students.*
>
> Elodie

Brian expressed his frustration at the high thresholds that are in place for student mental health support.

> *I can't believe when they say a student doesn't meet a threshold when they are seriously self-harming ...* [long pause] .... *I guess that's the other area isn't it ... That self-harm. Managing your own emotions when a student is intent on hurting themselves ....*
>
> Brian

The long pause that occurred in this section of the interview seemed to indicate that Brian was recalling a specific event with a student. Brian went on to describe his shock when he first experienced a student self-harming. He talked about the training he had received in this respect and how it had given him strategies for working with students who were self-harming, but still said that it was the *'hardest emotionally'* to deal with.

When asked by the interviewer what kept them awake at night, a number of participants stated that the mental health issues of students were a contributory factor to their insomnia.

I think now it is mainly the mental health issues that we are dealing with, the self-harm. I desperately hope that none of our students who engage in self-harm or suicidal ideation are admitted to hospital, but I fear they will be. An ex-student took their own life just over a year ago, and that had a huge impact on me emotionally.

Pat

So if anything keeps me awake at night it's the kids. Something could happen to one of them. Took their own life, something like that. Like with Matilda, it's particularly bad, then I think I hope this isn't the night I'm going to hear …

Kath

If anything, it will be the mental health of a particular student. I cannot believe that a student who is exhibiting extremely risky behaviour including self-harm doesn't meet a threshold. ….. where your cuts have to be a certain depth or your suicidal ideation has to result in a valid attempt before you gain access to services? And I guess I just worry about whether a staff member has said or done anything that may have triggered a particular episode.

Heidi

The insomnia and emotional labour reported by participants were likely to be exacerbated as the individuals had no power over the issue that was concerning them and this was evidenced with their reports of the mental health issues experienced by students at the schools involved in this research.

Whilst the school leaders in this research project seemed prepared for and understood the implications of the students' diagnoses they were still impacted emotionally by this and there was a strong link between student diagnosis and mental health concerns raised by a number of participants as an additional feature which impacted on their emotional labour as leaders of autism specific special schools. The inability to build effective relationships with students was also cited by participants as a factor that impacted on both them and their staff.

However, it was not just the diagnostic complexities that impacted on the emotional labour of senior leaders in these autism specific special schools, but the limited management structure which is found in such schools and this will be examined in the next section of this chapter.

5.2.2 Stakeholders

The pictogram in Chapter 3, page 50 identified four different stakeholder groups that senior leaders may regularly interface with in their role, and asked participants about their emotional management relating to these groups. The responses suggested a range of challenges experienced in these interactions and some are detailed below. Charlie, who has worked in the field of autism for over 10 years, gave several examples during her interview of how working with parents had impacted on her work:

> *We also have to recognise that some of our parents have been battling the system for years, 5 or 6 years some of them, and that adversarial interaction style has become embedded and they don't know how to change that*

Charlie went on to describe how an email from a certain parent evoked physical symptoms in her, which resulted in both an emotional and physical response.

> *And then there are certain parents, like the Jenny's of this world, where you feel physically sick when you see an email from them drop into your inbox, you know there are some parents who make you feel professionally unsafe.*

Mandy also provided an account of an interaction with a particular parent which demonstrated both her physical and emotional response to the encounter:

> *I feel sick afterwards, physically sick. On one occasion she just went for it when she came to pick him up, accusing me of all sorts of things, in front of not only the staff,*

but other students, parents, taxi drivers, it felt like the whole world was watching …. She just kept going, double barrelled. When she finally left, I had to deliver staff training, but emotionally, I was shot….

For both of these participants (Charlie and Mandy), the somatic response of nausea related to a particular social actor would seem to indicate that they had not found a way of managing their emotional responses to these specific interactions, with Charlie indicating that she often felt *'wrung out'* after conversations with the parent she referred to. As a contrast, Pat had found ways of managing her emotions when she encountered parental interactions that may elevate her emotions:

I try to be empathetic with parents, but sometimes that can be a struggle, particularly if they have a binary thinking style. And, you know, sometimes they have such an emotional reaction to something that you weren't expecting, it kind of catches you off guard, and for me those are the most difficult times to manage my emotions ….. When that happens I try to engage in a deflecting activity, you know, I'll suggest a cup of tea or I'll excuse myself to go to the toilet, anything that works that enables the discussion to continue.'

Brian had also found an effective solution for managing difficult meetings with parents. He recounted a situation where a parent had been shouting at him in a meeting, but by adjourning for a short period of time, he found a way to calm the dynamic:

I was shaking, you know, when someone takes you by surprise with their emotional reaction. Yeah, well, in the end I just said that we would take a 10 minute break because I wasn't prepared to sit in a room with someone who was so angry, and, you know, [pause]*, it kind of worked.*

Brian seemed almost surprised that this strategy worked and stated that it was a tool that he had in his *'back pocket'* and would use again.

Parental concern about their child's safety was raised by Brian as a situation that had resulted in a challenge, using the word *'fight'* to describe the interaction, whilst recognising why the parents may be concerned.

> *.. I guess with parents, my initial response would be to say to them 'you don't have to fight anymore and micro-manage - we know what we're doing here', but I guess they just want to ensure that their child is safe*

A similar view regarding parental interaction style was put forward by Charlie who suggested:

> *… in the time I've been here, ooh, let me think, about 7 or 8 parents who I've thought, wow, they could take us to the cleaners, not because we've done anything inherently wrong, but because they are stuck on a journey, on a track, and they can't get off. They'll challenge anything.*

Despite extensive training, Mandy suggested her staff team lacked confidence in dealing with parents because there was a fear of the response: *'.. they don't want to deal with parents, they don't really like making the weekly emails home that sort of communication, where they're more public, ... it's the fear of the response ..*' (Mandy).

Parents were not the only stakeholders where participants experienced the requirement for emotion management. The pictogram was referred to frequently by Elodie when recalling her interactions with a range of social actors across the various groups of stakeholders that she came into daily contact with, considering the emotional exhaustion that she felt as a result of this: '*I've realised that it's completely exhausting, you're thinking the whole time about managing your emotions, you're absolutely thinking the whole time. Without a doubt*'.

Anxiety in relation to interactions with a range of stakeholders was cited by Ally, who felt that having a low level of anxiety was beneficial because it indicated to her that she cared about the issues being discussed during these interactions: *' ..... because with all of them I always want to make sure I'm doing things right and with that comes a bit of anxiety'.* Ally went on to explain that one of her biggest anxieties was centred around staff and what they may say in formal meetings, where other stakeholders were present: '*In a way, I have more anxiety about that than the parents themselves.*'

It was suggested by Charlie that many staff found the frequency and range of stakeholder contact difficult to adjust to when they joined an autism specific special school:

> *I think they come here thinking it's going to be easier than mainstream, and then they get the shock of their lives – it's not just the students, but the parents and placing authorities put demands on them and they're just not used to that amount of direct contact with families and external agencies.*

Brian's quote seemed to succinctly encapsulate the exhausting effect that stakeholder support had on him:

> *I guess the staff need lots of strokes, you know, all the energy seems to drain out of them by the end of each term … I get that it's a demanding job, that the students can be challenging, particularly if they are experiencing mental health issues, … then you're supporting the student and the staff and the parents. Sometimes it feels like you're the only adult and you've got to be strong and have all the answers, and it's* [pause]*, I guess it's emotional exhaustion that you feel, but you can't show that..'*

5.2.3 Continuing Professional Development and Support

With the concept of emotional labour confirmed by participants and some of their perceptions of the contextual and environmental factors which effect this noted, the next step in this research was to explore what CPD and support participants had received, and if they had

suggestions in this regard for those new to the role of senior leadership in autism specific special schools.

From the data collected during the interviews, the perception of most participants indicated that they had received little appropriate preparation or support for the differences that they encountered when moving into an autism specific special school environment. Charlie opined that she had *'needed support to ensure I had strategies for those moments and situations where I could feel my emotions rising and making sure I did something earlier on than I did'*.

Brian referred back to his interview: *'At interview, I was told about the demands of the job and thought 'Yeah I can do that, it's not hard', but ..... it was a shock .....',* going on to say that he had not realised that there would be such intense demands on him. He further described how he came into the job without fully understanding the emotional impact it would have on him and the subsequent impacts on his home life:

> *I hadn't really understood the emotional demands involved, and I know* [pause] *well my wife and kids suffered a bit whilst I tried to get the balance right. I guess because I was holding my emotions in check during the day I either let them all out at home or just continued holding them in.*

It is important to recognise from Brian's quote the struggle that he recalled in finding a balance in managing the emotions that he experienced and the impact of this on his family.

In talking about her own preparation for the role, Anna queried whether it was possible to teach leadership in these specific environments: *Can you teach leadership is the other question* [long pause]*, I don't know'*. This rhetorical question seemed to really perplex Anna from the look on her face at the time, and despite being in her current role for over 4 years, she did not appear to have an answer. She went on to suggest that she would have benefitted from an independent person that she could use as a sounding board:

'I needed someone who understood the complexities of the children, but who would give me objective advice, rather than the induction that I received, which was good, don't get me wrong, but I'll be honest, didn't really meet the needs that I had within the first year around the emotion work I was engaged in with colleagues and parents.'

The induction process was also referred to by Heidi, who felt that at the end of it, she was left to *'cope alone'*:

'I had a really thorough induction. I knew a bit about autism, but not much about this particular cohort of students, so felt I had a lot still to learn. The induction was focused mainly on policies and procedures, which I needed, but on reflection, so many things were missing. I needed to know sooner about how parents may present and why, and about how emotionally demanding the work was, so I didn't have to cope alone.'

The content of induction came across strongly from all participants as lacking any information or support regarding emotional labour as Ally recalled: *'It's one of the things we are working on, a better induction programme. We all had lots of basic training, but there wasn't any discussion about how to manage emotion work, and yet that's such a big part of the job'*. Kath also reflected on her first few months:

'I don't think I needed any training on autism per se, but I needed someone to talk things through with. I know I got a lot wrong about working with parents, they're a completely different cohort of parents in their expectations and the dynamic is different'

It was not just the induction process that some participants opined needed reviewing. Elodie's view was that ongoing, independent support should be available: *'I just want*

someone to bounce ideas off. Someone objective who understands our environment but isn't emotionally attached to it – that's the ideal'. Mandy concurred:

> *'I'd liken it to being cut adrift at the end of the induction. That box is ticked, off you go now. I still need someone who understands the complexities of this school and can give sound advice, and that's not Governors.'*

Mandy's comment regarding a box being ticked seemed to imply that the induction process in her school was a formality rather than addressing the needs of the individual concerned. A crucial recommendation was raised by Pat: *'I think it's really important that we prepare those taking leadership roles in these environments to understand the emotional impact of their role. I think that's why we lose so many along the way, they're just not suitably prepared.'*

The points raised by the participants in this research indicated that whilst they received training on policies and procedures, they received little training or support prior to, or indeed, during their induction, to assist them in managing the emotional labour aspects of their role. It is evident that, although all three schools in this research project offer ongoing training for all their staff, training specifically relating to emotional labour was not currently included, but was something that the participants opined should be more openly discussed and included in staff induction, concurrent with suggested strategies to manage emotional labour.

5.3 Impacts of Contextual and Environmental Factors

This section has explored the participants' perceptions of their specific autism special school context and environment and the subsequent impacts on their emotional labour. The data indicates that student diagnosis is a major factor impacting on their work aligned with the size of the leadership teams. Alongside these factors are the complexity of relationship building with a range of stakeholders, but perhaps the relationships with the greatest impact on the emotional labour reported by participant senior leaders were the relationships with students and parents. All the participants also voiced the lack of support and preparation for their role as an additional contextual and environmental factor which they perceived impacted

their emotional labour. Recognising this, the following section explores the self-management practices that the participants engaged in to mitigate for the daily emotional labour required of them.

6.1 Findings – Self-Management and Resilience Building Strategies

6.1.2 Introduction

Having established that the participants in this research engaged in daily emotional labour and that there were contextual and environmental factors that interfaced with this, the question then arose as to what strategies these school leaders employed to mitigate for their emotional labour to enable them to build resilience. To assist the participants in explaining what actions they took to manage their emotions on a daily basis, they were provided with a verbal overview of surface and deep acting during the interview, (Appendix 3) to see if these concepts resonated with any of their interactions. This section of the chapter has three sections, 6.2 Surface Acting, 6.3 Deep Acting and 6.4 Emotional Absorption. These sections are followed by a section on resilience building strategies reported by participants (6.5). The impacts of these combined actions are discussed in section 6.6. The final interview question asked participants whether there were any positives in their work which mitigated for the daily emotional labour they experienced, and their responses and the impacts of these mitigating factors are noted in section 6.7. This chapter concludes with section 6.8 by drawing the three Findings chapters together.

6.2 Surface Acting

Participants were asked if they encountered situations where they recognised the emotion that they were feeling but disguised this to the social actor they were interacting with. All participants reported that they used this strategy daily, although prior to the interviews, were not aware of the terminology regarding this aspect of their emotion work. Charlie recognised that she frequently used this strategy: '*Oh yes. All the time, especially in corridor conversations, you know when you see a staff member looking glum and you just switch into upbeat conversation mode ….'*. This strategy was also acknowledged by Anna: '*All the time (laughs). Yeah, umm, yeah, completely and utterly all the time with staff'*. Anna went on to question whether the staff ever knew what emotion she was really experiencing at any point in time: '*… so they never know what I'm really feeling*', perhaps suggesting that her true feelings were masked when interacting with staff.

Mandy was aware of using surface acting to manage her conflicting emotions when dealing with difficult staff:

> *And then definitely with the others, you know, Victor at times, when all I wanted to do is slap him round the face and say 'Do your job', when actually I'm saying, 'Nice to see you, how are you?', and sometimes around George, where I was trying to portray 'I'm really pleased' when actually I was thinking 'You're poison'.*
>
> Mandy

During this section of the interview with Mandy it became apparent that she was still experiencing strong emotional reactions towards the two staff members that she talked about. The buried desire to '*slap'* Victor indicated a powerful response to Mandy's perception that he was not doing his job to the standard she expected. Likewise, with George, the use of the word *'poison'* to describe him portrayed someone who could be felt to be toxic. This raises the important point of how senior leaders are provided with opportunities to process such strong emotional reactions and this will be explored in the Discussion chapter.

Pat reported using surface acting to disguise her emotions as she explained that the ability to distance her authentic self from other social actors enabled her to manage in the way that she deemed was effective for the day to day running of the school.

> *Yes,* [pause], *I would say I use that a lot, with staff and local authority caseworkers mainly. ..... it's not that I don't want people to know the real me, I just find it the most effective way of managing. Let's be honest, if you've got a member of staff who has p******* you off, you can't growl at them every morning can you, if anything, I go over the top the other way, you know, 'How lovely to see you, how are you?'*
>
> Pat

Pat's quote described how the use of surface acting provided her with a means of engaging with these individuals on a daily basis without disclosing her negative feelings.

For Heidi, a similar process was followed. She shared an awareness that she needed to portray a different self to her authentic self to provide a means for managing a difficult home situation whilst maintaining her leadership role:

> *… daily, with staff. You have to keep that up beat positive front don't you – my God, can you imagine if I showed how I really felt when we were having the issues with my brother – you really do have to lead from the front in this job and that means emotionally as well – even if it isn't true emotion.*
>
> Heidi

Heidi raised a pertinent point in this quote regarding being an emotional leader and how the need for surface acting enabled her to fulfil this crucial role for her school, even when she was experiencing emotional turmoil in her private life.

Other participants used surface acting to deal with specific situations. Charlie related her reaction to a particularly difficult incident with some students: '*I was portraying to the other staff 'everything's fine, I'm OK with this, I'm in control' …. but in reality, my whole career was passing in front of me'.* A similar strategy was recounted by Mandy when some staff were being made redundant: *' …… trying to keep the positivity going, even though they were losing their jobs'.*

Rather than elevating her emotions, as Mandy detailed in the quote above, another element of surface acting was posited by Pat when talking about the suppression of emotional reactions needed by leaders in autism specific special schools, due to the transactional nature of stress:

> *I tend to suppress my emotions a lot, and I think that's really important for our students, that the adult remains calm whatever is happening around them. That transactional stress, it's just so contagious in a school like this, you know, if one student is really struggling and other students become aware of it the emotional contagion is very apparent, the whole school feels fragile and that can extend to the*

> *staff as well, so as leaders, we have to ensure that we are remaining calm and often the only way to do that is to suppress our natural emotional reaction.*

This description of the school fragility is pertinent, as Pat's quote detailed how this fragility spread from students to staff, requiring calmness from senior leaders, subsequently leading to suppression of her emotions.

Brian described a situation where he engaged surface acting in his responses to two staff members who he described as *'militant'*. He went on to state that they: *'... challenged every decision I made, it got really tiring, dealing with that opposition, but I just kept doing that fixed grin thing, when underneath I was raging, I didn't want them to see I was losing it ...'*. Brian's ability to engage in surface acting in this situation appeared to enable him to mask his true feelings towards the two staff members. Kath was keen to identify that she used surface acting with some staff and some parents, but never with students:

> *I'd say, um, never with the students, I always mean it with the students. Some staff, and some parents actually so I don't think it's across the board. I think I'm a bit like a chameleon, I tend to work out what somebody wants ...*

The use of the word chameleon is intriguing, as it indicated that Kath was changing from one persona to another, depending on the social actor she was engaging with.

The transactional nature of stress referred to by Pat earlier was echoed by Elodie, but in the context of her school's management team. She described how she used surface acting with other members of the senior leadership team to ensure emotional stability:

> *... with the other members of the management team, without a doubt. The real challenge is managing upwards sometimes, when you have someone who is not managing their own emotions and stress, and we all know stress is transactional, then you have the potential for a real melting pot of emotions, and someone has to take a*

stand and manage their emotions to prevent it all boiling over and affecting the rest of the staff team and the students.

The use of the words '*melting pot*' by Elodie provided an interesting concept as she furthered this analogy by talking about emotions '*boiling over*'. It would appear that she was describing emotions within the team that she struggled to contain and could only do so by engaging in surface acting.

6.3 Deep Acting

Existing research (Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000; Humphrey, 2012) recognises that there is a difference between superficial displays of emotion which do not reflect feelings as felt, as described in the quotes above, and the ability to summon up an emotion that may be required in a given situation, referred to as deep acting. The participants in this research were asked if they engaged in deep acting on a regular basis as means of managing their emotional labour as it is now well recognised that the impacts on the physical and emotional wellbeing of the actor is minimised when utilising these more genuine emotional displays. Rather than suppressing or elevating emotions for the benefit of others, deep acting involves the display of self-induced feelings. Elodie reported using this strategy most frequently with parents:

… so it is very much about empathising with them, and kind of, that can be quite, umm, not false, but those are emotions that you know you need to portray in those types of situation, but you're not necessarily feeling them, so you have to draw on something deeper.

Elodie seemed to recognise that being empathetic with parents was an important element of her role, but that she may not always naturally feel this emotion, using the word *'false'* to describe this, whilst acknowledging that she needed to summon up an appropriate feeling.

Deep acting was also a strategy that Anna reported using whilst chairing a difficult annual review with parents whose child was experiencing complex medical issues. She stated that she: *'... went into uber emotional control and summoned up the positive emotion I needed'*. Heidi also reported having to *'dig deep'* to find an appropriate emotion other than the anger she was feeling at the time:

> *'I was so angry that they questioned our actions. And then the mother of one of the students came into my office and just broke down, it was harrowing ..... and so I had to dig deep to find the appropriate emotion to respond to this poor parent who was broken and had no support'.*

In Charlie's case, deep acting was required to ensure she conveyed the appropriate emotion when speaking to a parent when they dropped their child off at school every morning:

> *'I dreaded those moments, but couldn't show it, so I would spend a few minutes each morning summoning up a positive emotion to enable me to interact with them in a professional manner, because they needed that from me, even though I found the interactions exhausting.'*

For some participants, it was not only parents with whom they used deep acting. Brian provided an example of working with students on a particular project he was involved with:

> *I guess I use that more with the students, 'cos they seem to intuitively know when you're faking it. Yeah, with the students, especially if I need to be enthusiastic about something ..... I kind of had to summon up this inner enthusiasm and get them on board with the project, and,* [pause], *you know what, in the end I kind of enjoyed it and I know they did ..*

Brian

Brian's summoning up of enthusiasm seems to have been a challenge for him, but once he had done so successfully, he found the resultant emotion that he felt and portrayed to the students was worth the initial effort as he reported positive student engagement.

Heidi also reported using deep acting when working with students, emphasising how she needed to centre herself as she needed to be emotionally calm prior to engaging with a student:

> *.. generally when a student is in a heightened state of anxiety and I'm asked to deal with them. I generally take a moment to think about how I feel in my 'safe' space – it's almost like visualisation – hold on to that feeling and then I'm ready to support the student ...*
>
> Heidi

It is interesting to note at this point the realisation by Heidi that she needed time to ensure her emotions were measured and that she was grounded before engaging with a student who was experiencing heightened emotions. Emotional contagion may be a foundation for this strategy as it is widely acknowledged that when working with students with autism, the need to remain calm is a priority. Pat concurred that she used this strategy of summoning up genuine emotions most frequently with the students.

> *The students, always the students. They have to feel that I genuinely want to help them through whatever the situation is. Usually, they are struggling to manage their emotions and I have to be the one who is saying, it's OK, take deep breaths, I'm here with you, we can get through this, it's not something you can do if you don't engage in deep acting, as it requires you to be emotionally regulated and grounded.*
>
> Pat

Charlie opined that her management style was to engage in a solution focused interaction style with students: *'.. to do that, you have to really want to help them move on, you can't do it in a half-hearted way, and for that you need to engage in deep acting'*. Charlie, Pat and

Heidi reported the importance of the students being effectively supported and to do so they recognised the need to display genuine emotions and therefore engaged in deep acting.

A further concept, emotional absorption, was described by several participants as facilitating them to ensure the emotional stability of their schools and this is explored in the following section.

6.4 Emotional Absorption

Emotional absorption is when individuals not only acknowledge the emotions of others and mediate their responses to them but become a receptacle for those emotions. Anna articulated the emotional absorption that she undertook on a daily basis: '*Oh every day, ……, the emotional regulation, absorbing other people's emotions.*' Anna went on to say that she had to engage in this absorption of emotions not only from her direct reports but also from other members of her senior leadership team, which she described as *'sometimes overwhelming'*, particularly when a significant member of the team was unable to manage or control their own emotions: *'I take it all on and I wonder sometimes how much more I can take'.* There was a moment during this section of the interview when Anna suddenly seemed to realise the impact this was having on her, as her facial expression changed, and she seemed momentarily tearful, although she quickly recovered and stated: *'If ever I'm emotionally dysregulated that's probably the thing that pushes me, it's managing that.'* It would appear from these quotes, that Anna was struggling to find a strategy to effectively manage her team member's emotional lability, and this was having a subsequent impact on her own emotional labour.

The absorption of the emotions of others within a leadership team was also referred to by Charlie:

> *Managing my own emotions is another matter, ….. I found myself absorbing the emotions of the Head Teacher. Don't get me wrong, I liked them as a person, but*

their management style left me taking on their emotion and the emotions of the other members of the senior team

Charlie

Charlie referred again later in the interview to absorbing the emotions of others, which possibly indicated that this was a key element in her experience of emotional labour. She recounted when she worked with a previous Headteacher who she felt had an authoritarian leadership style which resulted in discord amongst the senior leaders:

I was close to leaving, …. I had hit a wall – you know I had just taken on all this emotion from everyone else and it had nowhere to go, even though I had regular supervision that still was not enough to manage the emotional load that I felt I was carrying

Charlie

Again, when talking about the student dynamics with a more challenging cohort, Charlie reported emotional absorption:

And the staff were struggling too, so I was in a situation where I was angry and upset for the majority of the students, and then taking on the emotions of staff (laughs), not surprising I hit that wall'

Kath referred to staff regularly *'offloading'* their emotions onto her: *'They come in here and offload, not realising they leave me with all their emotional baggage.'* Emotional absorption was not only used as a strategy with staff, as Heidi recalled: *'I find that when parents are emotionally distressed, I am absorbing that distress and it has nowhere else to go'.* Pat concurred with this when relating to parents' emotional distress: *' …. I absorb their emotions, usually anger, frustration or sadness, and then I think I hold onto it until I get in the car to go home'.* Pat went on to describe how her journey home gave her time to rationalise the events of the day and release these absorbed emotions: *'… it takes about 40 minutes to get home and I just let it go, cry if I need to, and then I'm fine'.*

From the quotes above, it would appear that although the participants engaged in emotional labour almost subconsciously or automatically, they consciously adopted strategies to manage their emotion work. This interesting dichotomy will be explored in more depth in the Discussion chapter.

6.5 Resilience Building

With engagement in emotional labour established, and some strategies for managing this detailed in the previous section, the researcher was keen to discover whether participants engaged in activities to enable them to build resilience.

It is now widely accepted that a work/life balance is required for individuals to build resilience, prevent burn out and maintain their physical and mental well-being. For some participants, periods of reflection enabled them to identify actions that had supported them during times of challenge and facilitated recognition that they were building resilience, as demonstrated by the quote from Anna below:

> *.. I think I've learnt that I'm more robust that I actually realised I was. I remember in the early days when I was dealing with two students who were residential and the issues that arose with them, I didn't realise at the time how I was managing to juggle the multifaceted nature of the role, but on reflection, it stood me in good stead for developing strategies.*

Brian also talked about his ability to reflect on situations when talking about interaction with parents: ' *I kind of reflect on this often, if I was in their position and had been through what they have .. I'd be the same'.*

A different element of self-management was recalled by Elodie when talking about a relationship with a student that led her to realise that:

> *.. no one person or no one school can make everything right and you just have to sometimes, as hard as it is, just step back and go, we can't do anymore, and that has been really tricky for me to acknowledge, but then when you've done that once, when you've acknowledged that once, then you can kind of use that in the future.*

During data analysis, it was identified that several participants talked about having a different persona or stepping into a different role as a self-management strategy, and the following section describes the participants experiences of this.

Mandy described playing a role as a successful strategy for her management of emotional labour: '*It's like play acting, I tell myself I am physically playing a part, and trying to think that this is not going to last forever….*'. Following a particularly difficult encounter with a parent, Mandy explained how she could not let the staff see the impact that the interaction had on her: '*I couldn't let the staff see that – they needed to know that I could handle that type of thing*', and so she engaged in: '*that act, that performance, that face that I put on*'. It was interesting to note that during the discussion with Mandy, she referred to putting on a face when talking about staff interactions a number of times, indicating that this was a common self-management strategy for her. Kath agreed with this sentiment, stating that: '*You can't be the same person for every audience.*', going on to say how she adapted to different stakeholders: *'.. you adapt and weave to what people want or they need, I think I try and do that.*'.

Stepping into a role or playing a part was referred to by Pat who reported using it most frequently with staff and local authority caseworkers: '*I think I tend to step into a role in those situations, I have done for years, it's not that I don't want people to know the real me, I just find it the most effective way of managing...*'. Heidi concurred, indicating that this strategy would endure through each term until the next school holiday:

> *I kind of step into a role when I come in through the door – my work persona – you know it's funny, my husband always says that I'm a different person during term time, and I return to the normal me during holiday periods, so I guess I must adopt a different persona to cope with the day to day issues that arise and the consequent emotions.*

It is interesting that Heidi, Pat, Mandy and Kath all used dramatical language to talk about their management of interactions with others to ensure their emotional wellbeing. The idea of putting on a face or playing a role leads to the question of participants' own constructions of leadership and whether having separate work and private personas enabled research participants to better manage their emotional labour. This will be explored further in the Discussion chapter.

As a contrast to the strategies described above, this researcher was surprised when Kath talked about another strategy that she used when referring to some difficult interactions in her career. She detailed two instances which had a major impact on her emotional wellbeing and how she has kept the emails and letters relating to these: '*I keep them to remind me of how bad it can be. To never forget how bad it can be* [pause]. *And how far I've come. To tell myself, yes, you're OK, you're resilient, you went through that.*'. She then detailed how, having re-read these, she '*puts them in a drawer, in a filing cabinet and forget about it*'. Interestingly, it seemed that Kath used this strategy as a positive self-management strategy, although she admitted that re-reading the documents still evoked a negative emotional reaction: *'The damage there is so upsetting, it still upsets me….'*, and it could perhaps be questioned as to how effective this strategy was for her.

However, it was not only reflection or playing a part that enabled the participants to manage the emotional labour that they experienced. For many, it was physical exertion that helped and for Charlie, it was a combination of exercise and talking to her partner that helped:

> *.. I run and my partner and I talk a lot – well, when I say talk, … I offload to him and he absorbs everything – I wouldn't manage so well if I didn't have him to go home to – and the dog. She's old now, but just sitting and stroking her while my partner is cooking dinner, that works!*

Ally gave a detailed description of how she prioritised her wellbeing, knowing that if she did not do this, she was likely to become physically ill.

> *.. I do have kind of set routines, so like, umm, for my working week, I make sure that I go to bed by a certain time, umm .. I never drink alcohol Monday to Friday, not even a glass of wine (laughs), things like that so I get, or I try to get really good sleep. I exercise most days of the week … that's just sort of making sure that you're looking after your general wellbeing.*

This sentiment was echoed by Brian: *' I go to the gym and put my headphones in and just go for it – that helps, and then come back in again the next day.*' Mandy also attended the gym on a regular basis to manage her wellbeing, saying that: '*For an hour at the gym, someone is telling me what to do so I don't have the capacity to think about work … To be honest, without it, I don't think I could do the job.*'. Heidi referred to walking her dogs as her '*time to re-calibrate*' during the week, with undertaking more vigorous exercise at the weekends when she had more time. Pat reflected on a particularly difficult phase in her career, and reflected on how not engaging in physical exercise had impacted on her emotional wellbeing: '*I stopped doing the things I usually do, long walks, bike rides, half termly visits to a spa* [long pause]*, that was my mistake. I need to do those things to keep my emotions in check.'*

A few strategies were recalled by participants to ameliorate for the daily emotional labour that they engaged in and the impacts of these will be discussed below.

6.6 Impacts of Strategies for Managing Emotional Labour

For the participants in this research, both surface and deep acting were used as strategies for managing the day to day emotional labour that they engaged in. Surface acting was most commonly used with staff whilst deep acting was reported as prevalent during interactions with students. A third strategy, emotional absorption was discussed by both Charlie and Anna as being utilised with other members of their senior leadership teams.

Developing effective strategies to compensate for the emotional labour that senior leaders in autism specific special schools undertook on a daily basis can be seen as key for the participants in this research, enabling them to fulfil their role. Whilst a number of strategies were discussed, the two that were most frequent were regular physical exercise and adopting a persona to facilitate the leaders' emotional wellbeing. The question then arose as to whether there were any positives in the work which compensated for the emotional labour that these senior leaders undertook and helped build their resilience. This will be discussed in the next section.

6.7 Restorative Factors

6.7.1 Introduction

The penultimate interview question asked the participants if there were any positives in their work which, in their view outweighed the emotional labour that they undertook on a daily basis. Whilst not a strategy for managing emotional labour, the positive moments that participants recalled seemed to have a restorative effect on their emotion work and their responses are therefore included here.

6.7.2 Rewards

A common thread running through the positives articulate by participants was that of student progress, regardless of whether this was academic achievement, a student engaging with a particular strategy to manage their anxiety or a positive social interaction. Anna felt that

these moments occurred every day ' .... *every day there's something positive*'. Without these daily positives Heidi posited: ' … *this would be a heavy load to carry, but those golden moments, - there is one on a daily basis – they make all the rest of it worthwhile*'. Elodie expanded on this sentiment, explaining the particular elements that made up her restorative factors: '*I love the diversity, I love coming in and not knowing what's going to happen next, I love the celebration of tiny achievements .. I wouldn't want to work in any other type of world.*' Elodie's comment regarding not wanting to work anywhere else was echoed by Brian when he was reflecting on the positives that enabled him to manage the emotional labour he undertook: '*I love it here. It takes a while, but it gets under your skin, you know, I'd really miss it if I went back to mainstream*'. He went on to describe the type of events that he regards as positives:

> *It's when a student has been told at their last school that they'll never make anything of themselves … And then that student gets GCSEs and a place at a mainstream college, that is so massively rewarding. Or when a student with a massively restrictive diet cooks something that they have never eaten before, and then actually takes a mouthful of it* [pause] *or when a student hasn't been able to access the lunch hall and suddenly, there they are sitting there, with a massive meal in front of them, those are the things that make your heart sing.*

Charlie summed up her thoughts on the restorative factors which, for her, outweighed the emotional labour involved in her role:

> *There are so many, which outweigh all the negatives .... those little moments when you get a breakthrough with a student, when a strategy you have been working on with them for months works, the feeling you get from that is amazing, because you know you've helped a student overcome a hurdle.*

Pat was concerned that during her interview she had made it sound like a '*joyless experience*' and described the progress that the students at her school made which she felt compensated for the emotion work involved in her role:

I get so much from working here. Our students do such amazing things, make such progress. It's mainly the little things though that bring me joy, the picture that a student has drawn for me, the first time a student responds when I have been saying good morning for weeks, when we get a breakthrough when doing a comic strip conversation debrief of an incident, those are all things that lighten the load enormously.

Whilst both Heidi and Pat used the word *'load'* to refer to the day to day emotion work that they undertook, apparently likening it to a burden that must be borne as part of their role, they opined that this load was offset by positive experiences.

An alternative reward, altruism, was suggested by Ally, and this came through very strongly as a positive for the emotion work that she engaged in:

... I feel grateful every day that I do this job ... it's really important to do a job where you are helping other people. I think that's what offsets it for me as well, it's like, your job's got purpose .... I think it's a privileged position to be in, to be like, do a job where you get paid to help others.... Even though it's not like getting that direct praise, it's all those little things in someone's life that can actually make a difference, So I think to be in a job, even if it's not directly, it's for a good cause, that offsets all of that frustration and umm, emotion.

In contrast to the quotes above and unexpectedly, Kath talked about her impact on the students as a positive: '*I've got the letters of children that I have impacted on .....*'.

An additional element of restorative factors that participants voiced as supportive to their emotion work was the collegial support and mutual trust that they enjoyed from the other members of the senior leadership teams: *'.. for me, it really helps to have trusted colleagues that you can really share those feeling with and have the opportunity to process those*

emotions and feelings, because you can't shut them away' (Elodie). Having a supportive team was important for Kath: '*I've got some great staff here and we are a great team .. I'm appreciative of them*'. Mutual support and strength were recognised by Pat in her senior leadership team: '*It's a good job that as an SLT we are a strong team so that we support each other at times like this …* '. During her interview, Charlie spoke at length about the impacts of a previous headteacher on the senior leadership team at her school and spoke about the change when a new headteacher was employed and the strength that the team experienced as a result:

> *The new head pulled the team together and it was a strong team, and we were able to manage our own emotions because we felt supported in saying 'I'm having a crap day and I just can't deal with little Jimmy or his mother right now' and someone else would volunteer to take that on – we did it for each other and it worked.'*

As a contrast to this, Mandy was concerned that her newly formed leadership team would present a challenge before they were able to function effectively as a team: '*I want a team, but I don't want to feel it's back on me and I'm dragging people along, and even if I have to drag them for a period of time, will they start walking on their own*?' Mandy was aware of the need for openness within her newly formed team and wanted to explore the team's strengths and weaknesses and was pursuing training to facilitate this. However, this did not stop her from thinking '*dark moments are going to come*'.

6.8 Impacts of Restorative Factors

It is evident that some of the participants in this research project were more profoundly emotionally affected by their experiences than others, and that some managed to control their emotions more easily than others. The researcher was surprised that the restorative factors referred to by participants were generally intrinsic with none talking about positive affirmation from stakeholders. However, all participants gave examples of restorative factors which compensated for the emotional labour that they encountered.

An interesting aspect of this final interview question for the researcher, was that when posed, and the participants began to respond, their body language and facial expressions changed. This was the same for every participant. They leant forward, the tone of their voice changed, and they smiled whilst relating the events that they were recalling. This re-enforced for the researcher that these were emotions as naturally felt, rather than indicating an element of emotional labour.

6.9 Conclusion

From the interviews undertaken and the subsequent data analysis, it is apparent that the participants in this research project experienced daily emotional labour, with the potential significant impacts of this on their emotional health. There was a recognition that within their role, they perceived an expectation that they displayed appropriate emotions at all times, with many suggesting that they stepped into a role once they entered the school gates, using this as a protective factor against the emotional labour involved.

This researcher was surprised that only one participant spoke about emotional intelligence, using it in the context of staff: '*Emotional intelligence I find the most fascinating part of education and understanding people and how to react to them, yeah'* (Anna). On reflection, it may be that whilst educational leadership programmes talk about emotional intelligence and the competencies associated with this, the breadth of the concept now leaves it without a clear definition. Perhaps the answer is that, like many terms relating to emotion, it seems that currently, the definition lies in the interpretation of the individual.

From the data presented in this chapter, it is clear that one of the main challenges that senior leaders in autism specific special schools experience is building relationships with students and some parents because of the social communication and interaction deficits of their diagnosis, which may lead to the requirement of greater emotional labour. By exploring the emotional labour reported by senior leaders in participants schools and listening to their voices about the complexities involved in managing this emotional labour, it is anticipated that this research will fill a void in the special educational leadership literature.

Having presented the data from participant interviews and how this has addressed the research questions, the following chapter will discuss and explore the research findings and associated theoretical concepts, incorporating the possible implications for further research and induction for senior leaders in autism specific special schools.

7. Discussion

'It is lonely at the top' (Harris, 2007, p 40)

7.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to make a meaningful contribution to knowledge of the emotional labour perceptions and experiences of senior leaders at autism specific special schools, whilst adding to the body of knowledge informing the induction programme and continuing professional development and support for such senior leaders. A number of conceptual theories formed the foundation for this study with emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) and its alignment with elements of Marx's alienation theory (1976) interweaving with that of Burr's social constructionism (2003), and this chapter applies these to the findings from the current research study. The data has evidenced how these theories interlink and the subsequent impacts of these on the emotional labour of participant senior leaders in autism specific special schools. Understanding of the unique contextual and environmental factors which may impact on senior leaders' emotional labour has been enhanced and knowledge of the strategies which participants engaged to ameliorate for this emotional labour has been acquired. The findings also reveal the lack of training and support for senior leaders in participant schools and this has wider implications for senior leaders working with a similar cohort of students elsewhere, as they appear to be an anomaly when looking at supervision and support. The most recent government advice to school governors' states that ' …. Including mentoring and coaching support options if appropriate.' (Department for Education, 2017, p 30), rather than stating than it should be a requirement as it is for therapists and care staff working in special school environments. The question with this advisement is who decides on the appropriacy, as the current study indicates that senior leaders in autism specific special schools appear to be concerned that requests for support signify weakness and they may therefore be unlikely to request such support. This thesis hopes to go some way to changing the current practice in this respect.

The following sections review the different elements which arose from the previous in-depth examination of the data in the finding's chapters. The chapter summarises those findings and is divided into three main sections, with each section exploring the themes identified in

response to each research question and how this links to previous research. Section 7.2 explores the main concept of emotional labour, with the following section, 7.3, examining the contextual and environmental factors that are perceived to have impacted on the emotional labour of participants. In section 7.4, there is analysis of the strategies which participants reported using to manage their emotional labour and the factors that supported them in building resilience. The chapter concludes with section 7.5 which theorises emotional labour in the special educational needs sector. For ease of reading, the relevant research question will be detailed at the beginning of each section.

7.2 Emotional Labour

RQ1 What are the experiences and perceptions of emotional labour for school leaders working in autism specific special schools?

The initial interview question to participants in this research sought to determine their experiences and perceptions of emotional labour. As is evidenced in the previous chapter, the current study found that participants in autism specific special schools encountered emotional labour daily, with some social interactions being interpreted as confrontational. Perhaps the most significant finding in the current research, however, was not just the frequency of participants' emotional labour, but the fact that it was enduring throughout the school year, year after year, predominantly with the same parents, students, staff, and external professionals (Truta, 2014). The seminal work of Hochschild (1983) introduced the concept of emotional labour and explored the more transient relationships of flight attendants, where the emotional labour employed was for the duration of a flight, rather than the ongoing relationships experienced by participants in the current research project. Previous research suggests that the ongoing nature of emotional labour with the same individuals can lead to greater levels of emotional dissonance than those experienced by employees in service industries, (Cowie and Crawford, 2008; Gallos, 2016).

Data from this study indicated that, as a result of diverse interactions with a variety of stakeholders as noted above, there was a need for participants to be able to display a range of emotions dependent upon their interactive partner (Humphrey, Pollack and Hawver, 2008).

This concurs with Iszatt-White's (2009) ethnographic research in the learning and skills sector, which found that participants felt the need to demonstrate emotions congruent with their perceptions of professional display rules dependent on the stakeholder with whom they were interacting, which compounded the ongoing nature of the relationships and emotional labour required. In the current research, emotional regulation and emotion management were terms used by participants to describe their efforts to bring their emotions into line with what they perceived to be the requirements of their role, supporting Crawford's (2009) assertion that school leaders are required to display a professional, rational persona for the majority of the time, which is necessary for the smooth operation of the school. This is an important point to note, as the data from this research would suggest that the induction for aspiring leaders in autism specific special schools should include information regarding the frequency and type of interactions that may require them to engage in emotional labour, an element which none of the current research participants reportedly received on taking up their role.

A suggested unwritten rule of a school leader's life is suppression of emotions (Sachs and Blakemore, 1998). This suggestion is upheld by Oplatka, (2017, p 99), writing nearly 20 years later, who posits that school leaders should 'publicly display emotions indicative of confidence and optimism' even when they may be feeling similar anxiety or worry to their staff. There is no doubt from the current research that the day to day management of autism specific special schools is complex and varied, but despite this, leaders conveyed that they were expected to maintain a professional demeanour whilst interacting with other social actors, whatever emotions they were experiencing at the time, concurring with the views of Brennan and Mac Ruairc (2011) who suggest that one's role as a leader is to manage and regulate one's own emotions. An additional facet to this is that the emotions displayed by the senior leaders influences the emotions of their emotional associate which then affects the senior leaders' emotional regulation (Grandey and Gabriel, 2015). However, the emotional regulation, emotional dissonance, resultant stress and potential burnout described by Grandey (2003) in her research of higher education administrators, affected each participant in this current research to a greater or lesser degree, with some leaving the profession during the course of this research.

An unanticipated finding from the current research was that some participants appeared to be a buffer between colleagues on their leadership team and other staff, exposing them to even greater levels of emotional labour than some of their peers. A suggestion from the data is that those who articulated this element of emotional labour struggled with the impact of this and had not found a way of managing this within their teams, although there was no evidence in the data to identify why certain participants found themselves in these situations. Additionally, uncertainty arises from the variable of an individual leader's personality traits and previous experiences, which may have impacted on their perception of the emotional labour that they engaged in, with some individual's experiences being less impactful as their personality traits were more congruent with the expectations of the role that they held, (Beatty, 2007; Grandey and Gabriel, 2015; Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, 2006). However, there is a note of caution to be had when individuals reflect on past events, as opined by LeDoux (1998), who states that there may be more to explain an emotion than an individual is able to access through their retrospective consciousness, as there may be some events that one is not able to access introspectively.

An interesting aspect of the data was that a number of participants viewed their emotional exposure and management as part of their job, reflecting the initial concept of emotional labour described by Hochschild (1983), where emotions are managed as an integral aspect of the wage received for the role undertaken. However, as clarified earlier in this chapter, Hochschild's concept was for employees in service industries with transient relationships which is different to the participants in this research who have enduring relationships with a range of stakeholders where the emotional labour required may be greater (Iszatt-White, 2009). This dichotomy would therefore suggest that greater levels of support are required to ensure that individuals working as senior leaders in autism specific special schools are able to manage the emotion work that is an intrinsic element of their role, and the potential impact that this may have on their sense of self and well-being, which is discussed next.

Integral to the results of the first research question was the effect of emotional labour on participants and the impact of this cannot be overlooked. Some participants reported that they were unaware of how deeply they were affected by events until their emotions appeared to rise to the surface at unexpected times whilst others described physical responses such as

nausea in situations where they were engaging repeatedly with the same emotional associate who they perceived to be confrontational. This supports research which posits that adverse social encounters can be experienced physically, (Crawford, 2007; Fineman, 2000; Gallos, 2016). What was striking about the events reported by participants in the current research was the lack of support for the individuals (n=9 in this study) both at the time of the adverse interaction and in the following weeks and months, and the impression was that they were left to find a way to manage these emotions on their own. However, the possibility that participants would not have wanted to recount their experiences either at the time or afterwards cannot be excluded, although this would appear unlikely as they talked freely during the interviews about these encounters.

Analysing and contrasting the participants comments on emotional labour indicated that some were very aware of the daily emotional labour that they engaged in, whilst others were less aware, ceasing to recognise their emotional labour until interviewed or suggesting that they had become inured to it. It is difficult to ascertain why this discrepancy may occur between participants, but some suggestions from the data may be that the lack of recognition of emotional labour was due to the length of time that participants had worked in autism specific special schools, that it was due to their particular characters or that they had adopted the 'professional smile' that Hochschild (1983, p 4) refers to and therefore had reached a point where the continuance of feigning feelings had led to an estrangement from their feelings as naturally felt. An alternative explanation may be that more mature senior leaders are less impacted by their emotional labour experiences as they have gained a greater range of strategies for managing these occurrences (Beatty, 2000; Mackenzie 2012), although the current research was not able to provide sufficient data to prove or disprove this theory. Nonetheless, six of the nine participants in the current research recounted 'wounding' experiences (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004), which was a significant number and is a possible indicator that support for such experiences should be available to leaders of autism specific special schools to enable them to move on from these episodes, and this will be discussed in the following section, (see section 7.3 for a further discussion about the data as it relates to autism specific special schools).

7.2.1 Emotional Wounding

As the previous section has detailed, emotional labour for participants in this research was a daily occurrence. The data suggested that emotional labour was at its highest level when leaders were responding to personal criticism or attack, but the circumstances required a professional response, which was reported by six participants. Participants reported that these criticisms mainly came from parents, which aligns with the work of Friedman, (2002), who identified that interactions with demanding and unreasonable parents was a key indicator of the emotional exhaustion experienced by school leaders in his empirical research with mainstream primary and secondary school principals in Israel. The concept of 'wounded leaders' has been reported by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004) and Beatty (2007), who describe this as exhaustion, both physical and mental, from attempting to be too many things to a range of stakeholders. Incorporated in this concept is the suggestion that fear influences leadership and that for many, hiding fears can lead to dissonance, which is when an individual displays an emotion contrary to that which is felt. The current study found this to be the case, particularly following interactions which participants perceived as personal criticism, leading to them appearing to become stuck in their wounded state and unable to move on, thus compounding their emotional exhaustion. When participants were describing wounding events that had triggered a strong emotional reaction, such as personal criticism, it was evident that they vividly remembered the emotions experienced at the time, with some becoming tearful and others taking long pauses during their recall. Conversely, the data from the current research did not support the suggestion that wounded leaders became wounding leaders (Beatty, 2007; Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004), but this may be that the senior leaders interviewed did not recognise themselves as wounding leaders, or that if they did recognise this trait in themselves, they did not report it.

Feelings of vulnerability and loneliness were also conveyed by participants, but they reported supressing these emotions to fulfil the requirements of participants roles (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2011; Harris, 2007). Disclosure of emotions prior to the research interviews was reported as rare, with many participants describing suppressing their emotions at work, or withdrawing to give themselves time to regain their composure. This may explain why for many, their recall was so emotionally charged, as they had not had the opportunity to rationalise and move on from the experience. Aligned to the disclosure of emotions

described by participants was the language used during such disclosures and the next section explores this in more detail.

7.2.2 Emotional Language

Emerging from the literature review and linked to the emotional wounding (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Beatty, 2007) discussed in the previous paragraph is the concept of the language that school leaders use to encapsulate their experiences in this area (Beatty, 2007; Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2011). During the participant interviews, the language associated with the concept of emotional labour was introduced, and although none of the participants had encountered the concept and its associated language previously, they were quickly able to recognise the surface acting and deep acting elements of this. It is of note that during the current research participants articulated that the interview they engaged in was the first opportunity they had encountered to reveal their experiences and the interpretations of these, supporting Flintham's research (2003) of 14 headteachers who had left the profession early. What was surprising to this researcher was that participants in the current research had not discussed their experiences with other members of their senior leadership teams, although this may be because of the point raised previously regarding managing the emotions of others within the team, or alternatively, it may be that they thought that in doing so, they would be judged weak or not competent in fulfilling their role, (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Beatty and Brew, 2004; Berkovich and Eyal, 2015). A further explanation may be that without a common discourse, the participants had been unable to articulate their experiences and feelings to colleagues within their senior leadership teams, and by providing them with the language associated with emotional labour, this will facilitate such opportunities in the future.

Another key finding was the use of stark language by participants, with words and phrases such as 'tsunami', 'tide of emotions', 'melting pot', 'emotions bubbling over' and 'survival' being ones that had a particular impact on the researcher. One possibility for the use of such language is that when participants were overwhelmed by the emotions reported, it evoked a memory similar to natural phenomena that they had no control or management over. Another possibility is that these particular words may have been used to emphasise a point rather than

to portray a lack of control over events. Interestingly, the use of such language is reflected in the research undertaken by Ashton-Smith, (2011, p 45) who posited that senior leaders in autism specific special schools require several characteristics to work effectively, with "survival" skills quoted by one of the respondents in her research as a skill that is developed over time amongst leaders of such schools which may link to the resilience and restorative factors suggested by participants in the current study.

7.2.3 Safe spaces

Research suggests (Beatty, 2007; Beatty and Brew, 2004; Harris, 2007: MacLaren, Stenhouse and Ritchie, 2016) that safe spaces allow arenas for individuals to discuss their emotional experiences and move on from the woundings discussed earlier in this chapter, and an unexpected finding of the current research was that no such forum existed for participants. This lack of opportunity may have compounded the wounding experiences that some participants recalled and would suggest that an 'emotionally safe space' (Beatty and Brew, 2004, p 334), should be available to allow school leaders to share their experiences and emotional perspectives.

The availability of emotionally safe spaces is supported by Crawford (2009, p 25) who acknowledges that emotions and leadership are intrinsically linked, with an individual managing themselves within relationships, and that school leaders require a 'non-judgemental emotional outlet', but that finding such an outlet can be challenging. Whilst clinicians and therapists receive training in the clinical detachment required for their role (Austen, 2016; Williams, 2015), many school leaders lack these clinical detachment skills and are unprotected from the emotions of their work (Crawford, 2009). Notwithstanding this, it is evident that the school leaders in the current research experienced complex emotional experiences and were often exhausted by the emotional labour required in their role which appeared to be compounded by them feeling that they lacked a voice to describe their experiences. Harris (2007) asserts that the development of emotional literacy and emotional wellbeing is an ongoing exercise, which necessitates a safe climate where individuals can openly discuss their emotions. She acknowledges that the journey to a more emotionally aware school will require new styles of interaction and suggests that leaders should model this. She further posits that when individuals are in an environment that they perceive to be

safe, they are more likely to share their vulnerabilities and be empathetic in their responses to others. A pertinent point from the current research is that a climate where staff are able to be truthful about the emotional labour that they experience can be set by the senior leaders at the school, allowing a forum for sensitive issues to be discussed.

By providing school leaders in autism specific special schools with the discourse of emotional labour, opportunities for conversations within leadership teams using terms that are understood by team members could be facilitated, allowing an outlet for reflection and communication of individual experiences and a recognition that leading such schools is an emotional practice. It is posited that the provision outlined will reduce the rate of attrition of senior leaders in autism specific special schools (Gronn and Lacey, 2004; Scott and McNeish, 2013), as they will be better prepared for the demands of emotional labour.

7.2.4 Impacts of Emotional Labour

Whilst the research participants talked about their experiences of emotional dissonance, it was not so much that this occurred, but when linked with their comments regarding the frequency of their emotion work as noted earlier in this chapter, the impacts of this dissonance seemed far greater, (Schutz et al., 2007; Zapf, 2002). This may be explained by the fact that emotional dissonance is causally linked to job alienation and emotional exhaustion, with these effects being moderated when the individual identifies more strongly with their role (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2006).

Research indicates that an individual's sense of self can be impacted by the requirement to portray a positive exterior, (Beatty, 2000; Beatty and Brew, 2004). This is supported by several researchers who suggest that emotion management can impact an individual's authenticity and sense of identity, (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Fineman, 2000; Humphrey, 2012). An interesting finding from the data was the impacts on the participants sense of self, which would seem to be in accordance with the suggestion by Goffman, (1959) that these individuals are projecting a definition of themselves and the situation that they are engaged in, but that the requirements of face-to-face interactions does not always play out in

the way the individual intended. Crawford (2009) further suggests that when the values of an individual are compromised by the role they are being asked to play, then strain can occur in the individual. This dichotomy is explained by Schutz et al., (2007) as the inextricable relationship between identity and emotion for educators, for whom unpleasant emotional experiences question their identity and challenge their beliefs. For some participants in this research, it appeared that the emotional labour experienced was directly linked to their sense of self, and the more wounded they were by their experiences, the more impaired their sense of self and wellbeing. It would appear that if the individuals were not able to engage in resilience building or restorative activities following such experiences, they tipped towards role alienation and burnout, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The data from this research project would suggest that participant senior leaders in autism specific special schools reported more instances of emotional labour when working in these environments which they suggested had a number of root causes. Research into this specific area of emotional labour has been lacking to date, and this thesis will contribute to filling that gap. What is unclear from the data, however, is whether the specific student cohort at the three schools, where students are deemed to be cognitively able but with associated high levels of anxiety, influences the data in any way. The next section of this chapter will examine this in more detail, as it discusses the contextual and environmental factors which participants opined impacted on their emotional labour, including student diagnosis.

7.3 Contextual and Environmental Factors

This section of the discussion chapter will explore the factors which participants in the current research suggested contributed to the daily emotional labour which they engaged in. The sections discuss the data related to the second research question:

RQ2 What contextual and environmental factors in an autism specific special school further impact on school leaders emotional labour?

7.3.1 Contextual and Environmental

Whilst many schools advocate an open-door policy, the data from this research suggests that participants found this had a negative effect on their emotional labour as more than half had implemented this ethos at their school. Brennan and Mac Ruairc (2011) explain that in small primary schools there are few management posts allocated, with the schools relying more on communities of practice with a heavy reliance on interpersonal relationships to maintain the smooth running of the school. The current research would indicate that the open-door policy that supports good interpersonal relationships may be a factor in the amount of emotional labour engaged in by participants. Closely aligned to this was the participants views of the perceived need to implement boundaries with both staff and parents, and again more than half of participants reported the need to keep to boundaries to minimise the impact of emotional labour. Gallos (2016) refers to her earlier work with Bolman where they identified five key areas that leaders should attend to, and boundaries is the first of these. However, there is a caveat to this as the implementation of boundaries may lead to senior leaders feeling isolated from their colleagues and their own emotions in the process of implementing boundaries (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2011; Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004).

Boundaries also affected the hands-on nature of the work that participant senior leaders undertook, which was reported as a factor which impacted on the prevalence and levels of emotional labour experienced. At all three schools in the current research, there was no tier of middle management, resulting in the senior leaders working closely with students who may be struggling to manage their emotions, or engaging in a wide range of face-to-face interactions with many different emotional associates. The management structure at the schools also resulted in any complaints or issues going immediately to senior leaders, further impacting on their emotional labour.

7.3.2 Diagnosis

Most research participants reported that the complexity of students' presentation due to their diagnosis was a key factor affecting their emotional labour. The complexity of the autism diagnosis is recognised by Ashton-Smith (2011, p 44), who states that working in autism specific special schools is 'demanding, stressful and potentially challenging'. It is suggested

that 40% of autistic individuals are likely to have at least one anxiety disorder, (for example, alexithymia, Gaigg, Crawford and Cotterell, 2018), often resulting in complex mental health issues, which was supported by the data in the current research. Most participants reported that the mental health issues of students was something that kept them awake at night and that the self-harm, which sometimes accompanied these issues was traumatic for staff and students, further impacting participants emotional labour. A surprising element of the data was that only one of the participants received any support for managing these issues, leaving the majority to support all those involved as best they could and this has implications for practice as without support, the emotional labour experienced will remain at currently reported levels.

Whilst participants articulated that the students at all three schools in the current research experienced difficulties in managing their emotions, it was interesting to note from the data that they did not see this as a contributing factor to their emotional labour. Rather, they viewed alexithymia as a component of the students' diagnoses that they were actively supporting in their day-to-day practice. However, they did articulate that where staff did not recognise alexithymia as a core aspect of the students' diagnoses, emotional labour became a factor as they supported staff to understand the impacts of this. Another aspect of the autism diagnosis that was raised in the current research related to staff expectations and interactions with the schools' specific student cohort, who are classed as more cognitively able autistic individuals. This is a pertinent point, as emerging research suggests that more this specific cohort experience greater levels of anxiety than those with lower cognitive ability (Mingins et al., 2020). However, being more cognitively able does not necessarily result in the ability to form relationships with peers or staff.

Relationships and being part of a group are a fundamental part of education and it benefits school leaders to understand the social perspective of emotion, but this is not an area that is widely discussed in school leadership programmes (Crawford, 2009). This accords with the findings of the current study, where participants described the challenges faced in building relationships with the majority of students and some parents. Research suggests 'significant heritability' in autism, (Warrier and Baron-Cohen, 2017, p 1) which may explain this aspect of the current research data (see also Holt and Monaco, 2011; Warrier et al., 2015).

However, it is not in the scope of the current research to explore this in greater depth. Participants reported that the relationships built with students and parents are unlike those in either mainstream (Scott and McNeish, 2013) or other special schools where they have previously worked. This difficulty can potentially be attributed to the social communication and interaction difficulties which students experience as a core element of their diagnosis (Attwood, 2006; Baron-Cohen, 2013; Boucher, 2013), as they do not recognise the expected social norms or display rules that exist in an educational setting.

7.3.3 Stakeholders

As has been discussed above, the data shows a potential for relationship building with students and parents to be impacted by the students' diagnoses. However, in any educational setting, relationships with others are fundamental and Crawford, (2009, p 8) goes so far as to suggest that 'relationships with staff, pupils and parents, are quite literally at the *heart* of education' (sic). A key aspect from the data was the effect that parental interaction had on many of the participants, and whilst they were able to articulate why certain parents may adopt a particular communicative approach, it did not appear to lessen the impact on participant emotional labour. Feelings of fear and professional vulnerability were described from both face-to-face interactions and written communications with parents.

For participants in this research, there were a greater range of stakeholders with whom interactions occurred, including external professionals linked with students through health, local education authority or social care services, alongside the therapy and medical teams who were employed to support specific elements of the students' EHCPs. The data showed this as leading to greater levels of emotional labour on a daily basis, and, according to Iszatt-White (2016) greater potential for disagreement from those who may not like the strategy or direction of the senior leaders. This is supported by Harris (2007), who states that different stakeholders will view school leaders by their response to a crisis and whether they uphold previously stated values. She goes on to describe the emotional turmoil that may have taken place for the school leader, prior to any decision making, but that the various stakeholders are unaware of this and may not recognised the impact of the decision on the whole school community.

Another finding from the research was that participants reported greater requirements for staff support in their current environments. There were suggestions that some staff could become disengaged from their role, with their negativity impacting on others, a situation that Gallos refers to as 'toxic dumping' (2016, p 45). Iszatt-White maintains (2016) that senior leaders should acknowledge that employees will bring genuine emotions into the workplace, and that this should be considered when leading and managing these individuals. Other reports from the current research indicated that staff constantly sought support from senior leaders for interactions with both students and parents, which research participants stated resulted in emotional exhaustion. It was apparent from the data that the research participants attempted to present a persona to all stakeholders which they perceived as being professionally and politically correct, but that this had a resultant impact on their emotional labour, supporting Crawford's work with primary head teachers (2009).

Beatty (2000, p 335) suggests that school stakeholders expect leaders to be rational and emotionally controlled, and that this expectation of 'professional decorum', with the ongoing suppression or elevation of emotions, creates an artificial environment, which is unhealthy. Iszatt-White (2016) concurs with this view, reporting that a principal in one of the colleges in her ethnographic studies felt that the only place where they could be miserable was in their own office with only those who reported immediately to her.

7.3.4 Continuing Professional Development and Support

One of the most unexpected results from the current research was the distinct lack of professional development and support reported by participants when they commenced their leadership roles in autism specific special schools. The data indicated that all participants stated that they felt unprepared for their role and this had a subsequent impact on their emotions. The most prevalent aspect from participants was the lack of information or support regarding emotional labour. Many reported that they felt their induction, whilst covering policies and procedures, lacked any information about how their role may differ in an autism specific special school from their previous environment. Participants also suggested that there was a lack of ongoing support for the specific issues that impacted on their emotional labour regarding supporting such complex students, working with parents and the appropriate support of staff. This point was raised by Harris (2007), in her empirical research of school

leadership, where she states that there is an assumption that those preparing for school leadership must develop an understanding of the skills and theories associated with their role, but there is a lack of understanding regarding the emotional labour involved. The next section in this chapter will explore the strategies that participants reported adopting to compensate for their emotional labour.

7.4 Self-Management and Resilience Building Strategies

Whilst there was much in the research data which indicated higher than expected levels of emotional labour, research participants were keen to explain the self-management strategies that they employed to compensate for this and the strategies that they used to build resilience. This section of the chapter discusses the data in relation to Research Question 3.

RQ3 What strategies do leaders of school for children with autism employ for the management of their emotional labour and how do they build emotional resilience?

7.4.1 Self-Management

The data revealed that all research participants used several factors to mitigate for the emotional labour that they experienced. Participants in the current research suggested that they used surface acting (Hochschild, 1983; Humphrey, Pollack and Hawver, 2008; Iszatt-White, 2009) to either exaggerate or suppress their emotions for the benefit of their emotional associate, and that this was most commonly used with staff. Examples provided by participants tended towards faking positive emotions, such as greeting a member of staff enthusiastically when in reality the underlying emotion was one of frustration. Research indicates that this is less well received than when leaders are faking in good faith (Gardner, Fischer and Hunt, 2009). An unexpected result from the data was that research participants did not refer to surface acting and valuing practices, which involve social interactions with colleagues which make them feel valued. In her empirical research of leadership in the learning and skills sector, Iszatt-White (2009) refers to the valuing practices enacted by principals who enquired about staff's well-being or families, whilst thinking about education related issues. However, rather than assuming that the participants in the current research did

not engage in surface acting and valuing practices, it may be that they did not recall instances of this during the interview process. It would appear that the participants in this research used surface acting as a positive technique for managing the emotions of their staff team, thereby maintaining the emotional health of their schools. This strategy of appropriate emotional display is acknowledged by Gallos, (2016) who suggests that successful leaders require the capacity of an actor to be convincing in their expressions of emotions, whilst masking their true feelings.

In contrast to the surface acting discussed above, deep acting (Hochschild, 1983; Humphrey, Pollack and Hawver, 2008) was reportedly used most by participants with students and parents. This strategy enabled participants to manipulate their inner emotions so that they felt the emotion they wished to portray, usually prior to a meeting with parents or an interaction with a student who was in a heightened state of anxiety. The participants also reported deep acting as a useful tool for preparing for meetings which they perceived as being confrontational in nature. Using deep acting is suggested to result in leaders experiencing greater feelings of authenticity, although it is recognised that they are still acting (Gardner, Fischer and Hunt, 2009). Inauthentic leadership practice can have a negative and damaging effect (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2011), and Crawford (2009) explains that personal strain occurs when the role the leader is asked to play is contrary to their beliefs and values. There were some elements in the data where participants recognised that they may not be portraying their true selves to others, whether they were deep acting or surface acting, and this has implications for practice as authentic leaders are less likely to become alienated from their role, (Beatty, 2000) and are likely to experience higher levels of well-being (Gardner et al., 2005; Gardner, Fischer and Hunt, 2009). Current research (Gardner, Fisher and Hunt, 2009) posits that authentic leaders attempt to understand their weaknesses and strengths, including their emotions and values, resulting in relational transparency. Surprisingly, this was not supported by the data in the current research, but this may be due to the lack of opportunities for discussions regarding emotions at work reported by participants, or the size of the sample.

A point of interest is that both surface and deep acting result in emotional exhaustion (Gardner, Fischer and Hunt, 2009), although surface acting, with the requirement to closely monitor the interaction to ensure that it portrays the required emotion, is more taxing cognitively (Humphrey, Ashforth and Diefendorff, 2015). Crawford (2009) concurs with

this view, stating that the requirement for continuous displays of positive emotions can lead to ill health as a result of the emotional dissonance experienced and inability to regulate one's own emotions. The suggested impact of ongoing deep acting on the cognition of school leadership teams, (Maxwell and Riley, 2017) is also worth further investigation as they suggest that eventually, this may also lead to burnout. This is a highly relevant point for the current research as it may be apposite for aspiring leaders in autism specific special schools to be introduced to the concept of surface and deep acting and how they can be employed as tools to manage the emotional labour they will encounter, but with a recognition of the impacts described above.

An unexpected element of the data was that some participants engaged in emotional absorption, sometimes daily, becoming a receptacle for the emotions of those they interacted with. Absorbing the emotions of others was reported in participants who state they were not only managing their own emotions but supporting the control of emotions for their emotional associate (Gronn and Lacey, 2004). The ability to remain emotionally detached from a situation is a strategy that may help protect leaders from absorbing the negative emotions of others, which is suggested by Beatty (2000) to be essential to school leadership, whilst others may find that labelling their emotions and the feelings that they experience as a consequence may assist in the management of these emotions (Cliffe, 2011). However, whilst this may be a successful short term strategy, previous research has established that taking on the emotions of others without a means of mitigating for this can lead to impairments in mental and physical wellbeing (Crawford, 2009), and as discovered in the current research, access to regular supervision did not lesson the impacts of absorbing the emotions of the social actors around them. Gallos (2016, p 41) introduces the term 'emotional armour' suggesting that the ability to supress, modulate or compartmentalise emotional responses to negative interactions enables leaders to stay focused on their goal, and this would suggest that aspiring senior leaders of autism specific special schools use this compartmentalising rather than absorbing the emotions of others to facilitate their emotional well-being and ability to lead their schools. From the data it would seem that all of the strategies which participants reported using to manage their emotional labour were employed to enable a presentation of self as in control (Blackmore, 2004), and the overriding impression was that this was done in the belief that displaying negative emotions was not acceptable in a senior leader, even with other senior leaders within the team, which will be discussed further in section 7.5.

7.4.2 Resilience Building

It is recognised that resilience, well-being and a work-life balance are key terms in current educational thinking (Sardar and Galdames, 2018; Scott and McNeish, 2013). Research suggests that emotional resilience is a key factor for school leaders to achieve success and be able to bounce back from adverse situations, (Day, 2014; Steward, 2014), although Day suggest that a clear definition of emotional resilience is required to facilitate further debate.

With the daily emotional labour reported by participants in the current research, building resilience was key. An effective strategy described by participants to build resilience was stepping into role, where the individual adopted a persona dependent on the emotional associate that they were engaging with, allowing them to put distance between themselves and their emotions (Iszatt-White, 2016). The data also revealed that the ability for participants to separate their personal and work lives facilitated their management of emotional labour (Grandey, 2000). Some data indicated a range of personas being adopted, reflecting the 'montage' of selves referred to by Ashforth and Tomiuk, (2006, p184), which has a resultant impact on the feelings of authenticity experienced. This supports Sachs and Blakemore's (1998, p 273) findings that the principals in their research would '.. put on a brave face…' as a strategy for managing their emotional labour. They go on to suggest that being professional was synonymous with being in control with various stakeholders perceiving them as efficient, which they attempted to reflect in their demeanour and style of dress. An unanswered question, both from the current research and from the literature review is the degree to which the need for success and approval impacts on the anxiety and emotional labour of school leaders. The different selves described by participants is aligned to an assertion by Hochschild (1983) that some employees have two selves, and that these individuals are more skilled at deep acting, with a clear separation between their work self and their home self. Hochschild further suggests that to avoid burnout, individuals are required to have the self-awareness to recognise when they are deep acting, surface acting or being their true selves. This leads us to question whether there is a resultant alienation of self, which Hochschild links to Marx alienation theory (1976), a matter which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, adopting a persona was not the most common strategy for building resilience.

Many participants reported the beneficial impacts of physical exertion on their wellbeing, with a recognition that if they did not undertake exercise, then their ability to manage their emotional labour was impaired. This physical exertion included activities such as walking, attending the gym, running and dog walking. These strategies are similar to those adopted by the managers in the research undertaken by Ingram and Iszatt-White, (2016), where exercise was cited as a key tool for managing their emotional labour. This is a pertinent point for new senior leaders in autism specific special schools to note, as this research indicates that without a pursuit outside of school that enables them to switch off, their well-being is negatively impacted.

The review of empirical evidence undertaken by Berkovich and Eyal (2015, p 141) identified that school leaders could develop resilience by becoming assertive and determined. However, they caveat this by stating that this approach may lead to an impaired ability to express vulnerable emotions, which in in turn could lead to 'emotional burnout'. Day and Schmidt (2007) suggest that positive emotions can ensure that resilience becomes an ongoing resource, to be drawn upon as required. This is supported by Sardar and Galdames (2018) who posit that resilience, good well-being and a work-life balance are effective strategies for educational leaders, whilst Scott and McNeish (2013) suggest that leaders of special schools require resilience to manage the emotional and practical stresses involved in their daily work. In the current research, although resilience building supported participants in managing their emotional labour, they also referred to restorative factors which will be discussed in the next section.

7.4.3 Restorative Factors

As a final question, participants were asked if there were any aspects of their role that compensated for their reported emotional labour and many of their reminiscences resonated with Flintham's concept (2003a) of topping up a reservoir of strategies to avoid burnout. The analogy of a reservoir is helpful to describe the external depleting influences versus the restorative and resilience building strategies which top up the reservoir and prevent the balance tipping into role alienation, impaired wellbeing and burnout, which Flintham (2003a, p 10) reports in his research as a 'draining of the emotional reservoir'. From the current

study, it would appear that the most cited restorative factor for participants was student progress, whether this be academic or personal. The examples provided were subjective and personal and it is therefore difficult to generalise results across participants, but all cited this element as contributing to reduce the impact of their emotional labour.

A surprising element from that data was that collegial support was identified as a restorative factor, which is contrary to some of the earlier reported data, where some participants experienced elevated levels of emotional labour within their leadership teams. This may be because those who viewed collegial support as a restorative factor were not the same individuals who experienced elevated emotional labour within their team, or it could be that these are separate and contextually bound memories. Research indicates that the ability to seek support from team members has been successfully employed by others in the field of education, although neither Beatty (2000) or Flintham (2003b) include SEN schools in their empirical studies.

Altruism and the feeling that the job being undertaken was of value was cited as another restorative factor, which aligns with the work of both Iszatt-White (2016) and Flintham (2003b) who suggest that the emotion work of leaders has a foundation of values and beliefs leading to the interpretation of their work as 'moral and rewarding' (Flintham, 2003b, p 18). Despite the daily emotional labour experienced, participants in the current research suggested that they found their role intensely rewarding, which is reflected in the research undertaken by Mackenzie, (2012) who stated that, despite the intensity of the highs and lows of working in the field of SEN, it was the positive emotions which sustained individuals in their role. However, Mackenzie did suggest that those individuals who were better able to cope with the emotional labour involved in their role appeared to be more experienced in the field of SEN, but as this was not a focus for the current research, it is not possible to support this from the data.

Overall, the restorative factors that the participants referred to as protecting factors for their emotional labour align closely to those reported by Crawford et al., (2018) when exploring the emotional labour of higher education special education teachers in Australia. An interesting point which surprised this researcher was that the restorative factors referred to by

participants were generally intrinsic, with none talking about the positive affirmation from stakeholders which are detailed in Crawford's research in 2007.

Resilience building and restorative factors suggested by participants in this research were reported as compensating for their daily emotion work, without which, it would appear that their wellbeing became impaired, and they became vulnerable to role alienation and burnout. The balance between these positive and negative factors will be discussed in the following section.

7.5 Theorising Emotional Labour in the Special Educational Needs Sector

As a result of the current interpretivist research into the perceptions of emotional labour by senior leaders in autism specific special schools, a number of theoretical concepts are drawn on, primarily social constructionism, (Burr, 2003), Hochschild's emotional labour (1983) and aspects of Marx's alienation theory.

There have been various theories of alienation with that of Marx being the most prominent (Mastracci and Adams, 2018; Musto, 2010), which was covered in greater depth in the literature review. Linking with alienation theory, Hochschild purports that the commodification of emotional labour can become alienating, leading to an inauthentic presentation of self and alienation. The links between the work of Marx and that of Hochschild have been criticised by some (Bolton, 2005; Bolton and Boyd, 2003).who suggest that Hochschild appears to have taken only two of the four elements of Marx's alienation theory and discounted the others. The four elements suggested by Marx as alienating the worker are:

- Alienation of the from the product of their labour
- Alienation from the process of their labour
- Alienation from their own creative being
- Alienation from other humans

The focus for Marx was on the rejection of capitalist ideology, the ability of individuals to adopt collective practices to change society, and on the relationships between an individual's 'work activity and social and intellectual existence' (Musto, 2010, p 94). A key element in Marx's concept of alienation was that of fetishism, individuals would search for meaning in objects of that did not have job fulfilment. He regarded this fetishism as a social phenomenon and a facet of the domination of the market economy. An important point to note about this concept of alienation is that is was deemed to be all pervasive in an individual's life, (Mastracci and Adams, 2018) and it is this element which links with the burn out associated with emotional labour.

Critics of the emotional labour links with alienation theory, (Bolton, 2005, Bolton and Boyd, 2003) suggest that the focus from Hochschild has been on employees loss of control over both the product of their labour and on the process of their labour, omitting the links with alienation from fellow beings and alienation from the human spirit. However, Brook (2009a) counteracts these arguments and gives detailed analysis of the links between Hochschild's emotional labour theory and Marx's alienation theory.

The current study indicates that perhaps the overarching factor for participants' emotional labour comes from the social constructionism of school leadership by an extended range of stakeholders, which seem to be unique to autism specific special schools, shown at the centre top of Figure 8.1, page 152. These stakeholder relationships are enduring and require senior leaders to quickly adapt their interactions and present a different self to different stakeholders, suppressing or elevating their emotions to meet the need of their emotional associate. It is interesting at this point to note the shift in stakeholder relationships in education in the past twenty years, which appears to have had an impact on stakeholders' views of school leaders, which a number of researchers suggest is due to a neoliberal approach to education, (Ball, 2003, 2012; Lynch, 2013; 2014; Lynch, Grummel and Devine, 2012; Schmidt, 2010).

The change in the management of education has shifted from centralised governmental control to local control, resulting in a focus on performativity and the commodification of education (Ball, 2003, 2012; Lynch 2014; Schmidt, 2010), with school leaders having to

familiarise themselves with a new discourse and the practices of the private sector. These practices include performance league tables for schools, (enabling parents to request a place at a higher ranked school or one with a better inspection rating), target setting, appraisals and performance related pay. Within the new discourse, stakeholders have become customers, and Ball (2003, p 220) highlights that the 'flow of changing demands, expectations and indicators' which lead to continual accountability and recording. With the rise in accountability from user groups such as parent forums, (Lynch, 2014; Schmidt, 2010), particularly those on social media, there is the possibility of greater control and influence on school leaders than has previously been the case. The current research has indicated that these changing demands and expectations from stakeholders seems to have impacted their individual social constructionism of school leadership with the potential result that school leaders try to ensure that they are presenting in the appropriate way to the relevant social actors.

Additionally, for school leaders of independent autism specific special schools, this level of accountability may be elevated, as the income they receive is directly linked to the budget available, seemingly requiring the leaders to have a sound understanding of budgetary control and market principles, as, for the schools in the current research, there was a similar school within each of the relevant local authorities. These market principles have the possibility of schools becoming competitors, with school leaders engaged in commercial aspects of education for which they may not have received relevant training, further impacting their emotional labour as they juggle the financial and educational aspects of leading their schools. Lynch (2014, p 5), writing about the field of higher education suggests that when effectiveness and efficiency are prioritised, there is a 'devaluation' of moral purpose, with the subsequent commodification of education.

It is recognised that school leadership demands a range of skills (Lynch, 2014), some of which are unique to the field of education, including the ability to develop and nurture student growth and attainment. In special educational needs settings, such growth and attainment are not always easily measured or comparable within the same progress tables or timeframes as other educational settings (Ball, 2003). Levels of student attainment in autism specific special schools are also directly related to the cognitive ability and specific diagnoses

of students referred to the school from the placing authorities year on year, possibly making comparisons of performance an unreliable indicator of school success. However, there remains the requirement to publish exam results on a school's website seemingly leaving school leaders open to further public scrutiny with the possible subsequent impact on their sense of self as a leader.

Figure 8.1 below details the factors from the research data impacting on participants reported emotional labour, with the positive and negative factors balancing out. This balance is fragile however, and only maintained if reported compensatory elements are enacted. The resilience building and restorative factors identified in the findings included self-management, playing a role and student progress, and these are indicated on the left of Figure 8.1. However, the data indicated that particular issues impacted participants emotional labour including negative interactions with a range of stakeholders, lack of effective induction, continuing professional development and support, and the size of leadership teams in participants schools, which are indicated to the right of Figure 8.1. An excess of these negative interactions, without sufficient compensatory factors appeared to result in an emotional labour tip towards impaired well-being, role alienation and burnout, indicated by the dotted blue line from emotional labour at the bottom right of Figure 8.1.

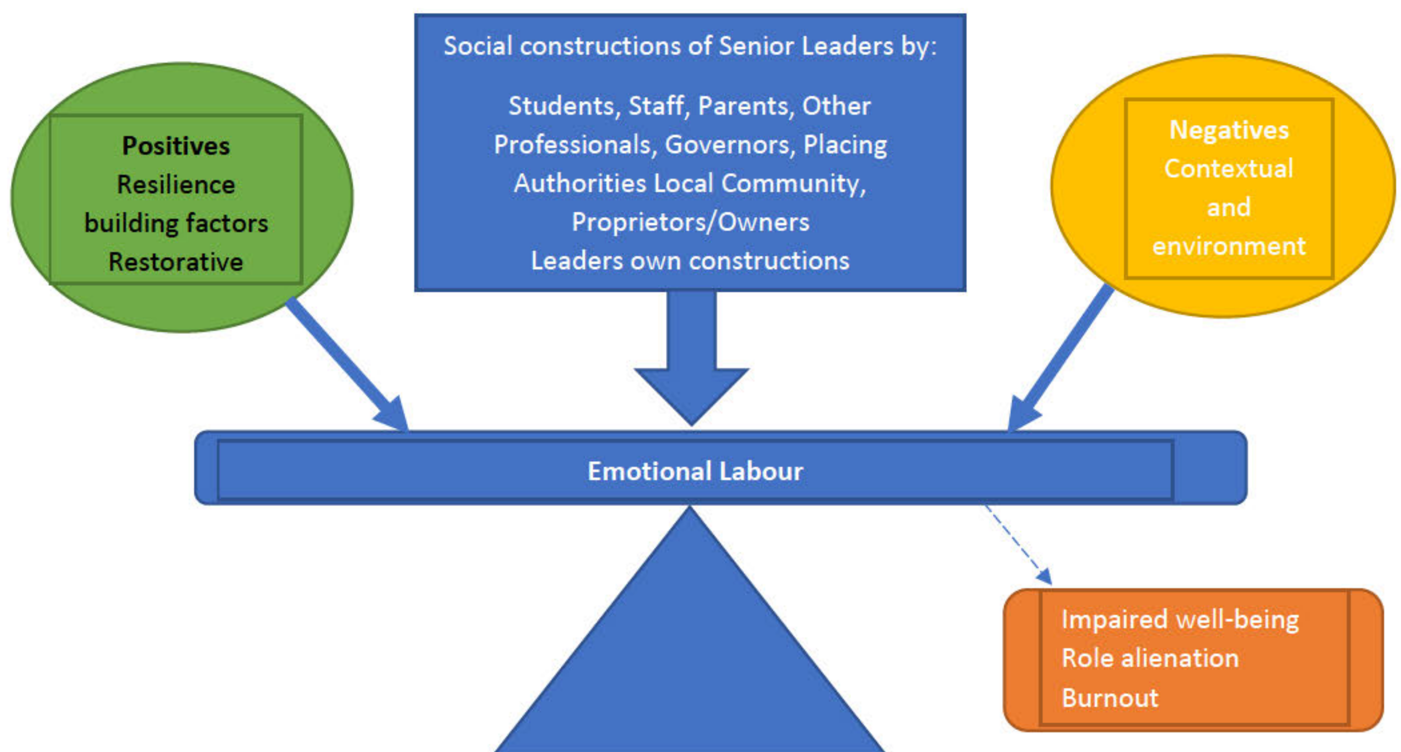

Figure 8.1 Positive and Negative Factors Impacting Emotional Labour with Potential Tipping Point

It is difficult to ascertain whether participant school leaders had a pre-conceived notion of enacting a top-down leadership model, or whether the social constructionism of stakeholders has impacted participant leadership styles. With the range of stakeholders associated with autism specific special schools the social construction that a visiting educational psychologist has of a school leader may be very different to that of a parent, and there is the possibility of leaders trying to be all things to all people. As part of their leadership practice, participant senior leaders reported engaging in surface and deep acting as strategies to manage their daily emotional labour, alongside events that they reported as wounding them (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004). The impacts of these combined negative elements on the individuals are evident from the research, as is the lack of support that the participants received in managing their emotional labour, not only during their induction, but on an ongoing basis.

Research indicates that for professionals undertaking emotionally demanding work, supervision is a support mechanism which provides a forum for them to discuss the personal and professional impacts of their day-to-day work (Falender and Shafranske, 2014; Martin, Kumar and Lizarondo, 2017). Whilst this professional support is a requirement for care workers in residential special schools, (Department for Education, 2015), therapists, psychologists and other medical professionals, it is not a requirement for school leaders in any educational environment (see Headteachers' Standards, DfE, 2020). This is surprising as it is well reported that school leaders engage in high levels of emotional labour, and these levels are likely to increase as the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic unfold further. Without the protection skills to shield themselves from the strong emotions of others, a personal toll is likely to be the consequence, (Gallos, 2016). The question then arises as to the ethics of care for senior leaders of autism specific special schools as from this research, it seems that the school proprietors either do not recognise the emotional labour that their senior leaders are engaged in, or do not feel that support systems are necessary. This lack of support has the potential to affect the senior leaders' abilities to support the staff below them, with the subsequent impact on succession planning, as unsupported staff are unlikely to apply for leadership roles. It is likely therefore, that without intervention, the already high attrition rates of school leaders in autism specific special schools will increase further

With the potential increase in leaders of autism specific special schools leaving the profession, there are several factors which are likely to co-occur. Anecdotal evidence suggests that recruitment of leaders for autism schools is a challenge, with many posts being re-advertised before a suitable candidate is appointed, and the associated costs for this in both advertising and short-listing/ interview time are high. The stability of the school is likely to be impacted, as the confidence of all stakeholders is affected when senior leaders move on, and a new incumbent arrives, as new leaders coming in may bring with them new ideas and change systems which necessitate different ways of working, potentially impacting staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders. The impact on relationships with stakeholders in appointing a new leader cannot be underestimated. For the new leader, the desire for a clean slate is likely, although the stakeholders will be inherited with their own unique history and new ways of working may reignite old emotions, (Gallos, 2016). From a student diagnostic perspective, the current research indicates that there are qualitative differences in the relationships between staff and students at autism specific special schools, and the change of leader is an event which students may have difficulty in adjusting to, due to the implications of their condition and their dislike of change. This dislike of change may impact on student behaviour which consequentially, may then affect both staff and parents, leading to further stakeholder anxiety. It is not difficult to see how these elevated levels of anxiety from stakeholders will further impact the emotional labour of the new leader, and without strategies or support to manage this, they may become emotionally exhausted much sooner than would be expected. However, the factors discussed above have a wider reach than senior leaders working in autism specific special schools. There is a high probability that leaders of units attached to mainstream schools, where the unit caters for a similar profile of students to those in the current research, are likely to experience comparable demands on their emotional labour.

Whilst the above factors paint a bleak picture, there are aspects of working in an autism specific special school which participants in this research reported as compensating for the emotional labour that they engaged in. Alongside this, their ability to identify self-management and resilience building strategies were cited as factors which supported them remaining in their role.

7.5 Conclusion

The current research project has identified that senior leaders in autism specific special schools encounter emotional labour daily and use a number of strategies to compensate for this. The importance of emotional labour to support the development of effective relationships with all stakeholders, and the ability to perceive the emotions of others, show empathy and express one's own emotions are supported by the data, which aligns with the suggestion of Harris (2007, p 393) that '….. leadership in schools is an emotional practice', and for this reason it is essential that leaders are able to find a balance between their own wellbeing and the emotional labour that they engage in. It is acknowledged that leaders experiencing stress may transmit that stress to others that they engage with (Humphrey, 2012), but that emotional labour strategies may enable the leader to contain their anxiety and thus spare their interactive partners from experiencing the same stress.

The social constructions of participant senior leaders in this study led to a number of self-management strategies. However, it is evident from the data that these strategies did not always compensate for the self-reported emotional labour demands from the range of stakeholders that they interacted with, leading to impaired wellbeing, role alienation and burnout (Mastracci and Adams, 2018). Mastracci and Adams further suggest that an individual who is burnt out from emotional labour may view the next 'customer' in a more negative light with the potential for the next grievance. In the current research some elements of the data indicated that a negative lens may have been adopted by some participants, which is a noteworthy point, as the implications for practice when this occurs are concerning.

The final chapter of this thesis will make some recommendations regarding the induction and continuing professional development of new senior leaders in autism specific special schools to enable them to manage the emotional labour demands of their role which have been identified through this unique research project.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to explore the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) perceptions (Hochschild, 1983), of nine senior leaders in three autism specific special schools in the south of England. The foundation of this study was an exploration of the emotional labour literature and an initial remark from a colleague, following which a more extensive literature review was conducted. Whilst some research was found exploring the emotional labour perceptions and experiences of teachers and autistic children, there was a distinct lack of research examining the experiences of senior leaders at autism specific special schools, and this thesis has gone some way to fill that void.

As a result of this study, understanding of the contextual and environmental factors which impact on the emotional labour of these senior leaders is now enhanced, and there is greater knowledge of strategies that participants have used to compensate for this labour which may be beneficial for others, and the resilience building strategies that have been found to be effective. This chapter draws the thesis to a close by providing a summary of the study in section 8.2, followed by an overview of the original contribution to knowledge in section 8.3. Section 8.4 details implications of the research and future recommendations, with section 8.5 providing this researcher's reflections on participation in the Education Doctorate programme.

8.2 Study Synopsis

There have been few prior studies which have explored the perceptions of teachers working with young people with autism and other special educational needs on their emotional labour and the ameliorating factors that enable them to continue in their role (Kerr and Brown, 2016; Mackenzie, 2012). However, one empirical review undertaken by Jennett, Harris and Mesibov (2003), although 18 years old, looked at the potential stress factors in such relationships, identifying that for teachers working with students with autism, there were greater demands in the relationships between teachers and parents, although the authors do not posit why this may be. However, nothing was found when undertaking a literature

review for the current research exploring the impact of emotional labour on senior leaders of autism specific special schools, the strategies they use to manage this emotional labour and the factors that they perceive as facilitating their continuing in role. The current attrition rate for senior leaders in SEN schools is high, with many leaving the profession reporting that they are burnt out (Scott and McNeish, 2013). It is conceivable that the attrition rate of senior leaders in autism specific special schools is due to the factors identified in the current study alongside the neoliberal agendas, detailed in section 7.5, which have permeated education since Jennett et al.'s study, all of which contribute to the emotional toll of the job.

This author was cognisant of the points made by researchers (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Beatty and Brew, 2004), who posited that the domain of leadership in education did not freely acknowledge the emotional challenges that school leaders faced, and whilst their articles are over fifteen years old, in this researcher's experience, it remains the case, and this is supported by the current study. Further, the authors suggest that the affective domains of school leadership should be considered by researchers, including the emotional experiences of school leaders, and the current research has aimed to do that, examining the emotional labour experiences of a group of senior leaders in three autism specific special schools in the south of England, giving voice to their perceptions and experiences.

The purpose of this study was to make a contribution to begin to address theoretical and empirical gaps identified in the literature, and give these senior leaders a voice, empowering them to talk about their experiences and perceptions as to why their emotional labour may be greater in their current educational establishments than in the generic special or mainstream schools that they had worked in previously, providing a better understanding of their unique experiences. Three main questions underpinned this thesis:

RQ1 - *What are the experiences and perceptions of emotional labour for school leaders working in autism specific special schools?*

RQ2 - *What contextual and environmental factors in an autism specific special school further impact on school leaders emotional labour?*

RQ3 – *What strategies do leaders of schools for children with autism employ for the management of their emotional labour and how do they build emotional resilience?*

8.2.1 Research Question One Findings

In answering research question one, this study has identified that participants perceived their levels of emotional labour to be far greater in autism specific special schools than in any other educational environment they had previously worked in. None of the participants had encountered the language of emotional labour but understood the concept when it was introduced. Their perceptions were that they engaged in daily emotional labour with consequent impacts on their wellbeing and sense of self (Goffman, 1959), which accords with the social constructionism (Burr, 2003) foundation of this thesis. The impression from the participants was that they did not share their experiences of emotional labour even to colleagues in their senior teams, as to do so may be perceived as weak both by their colleagues and other stakeholders.

8.2.2 Research Question Two Findings

Participants posited several factors as to why their emotional labour was greater in autism specific special schools, answering research question two. The factors suggested included the complexities of student diagnosis and the challenges that students faced as a result of this; the greater number of stakeholders with whom the senior leaders regularly interacted and the distinct lack of continuing professional development and support for the emotional labour aspects of their work. From the data, the social communication and interaction and rigidity of thinking characteristics which are core elements of an autism diagnosis (Attwood, 2016; Baron-Cohen, 2008), impacted on both the senior leaders and their staff, and whilst the participant senior leaders in this research understood the implications of an autism diagnosis when taking up their role, they did not have any insight as to how this may impact on their emotional labour, and subsequently, their levels of emotional exhaustion and well-being.

The research also shows that participants interacted with a greater number of stakeholders in autism specific special schools than they had in previous environments. The data indicates that this was due to the size of the schools participating, where the leadership teams had three or four members without another tier of management between themselves and their teaching and support staff. The resultant impact of these management structures was that the senior leaders had a more hands on role in their current settings than they had encountered previously, dealing with a greater range of stakeholders on a daily basis. The reported effects of these particular management structures on senior leaders is an issue that those new to the role may not have envisaged and one that should be highlighted during induction as an element that requires recognition alongside the suggestion of possible strategies for its management.

Perhaps the most striking factor from the current research was the lack of support and professional development reported by participants, both on taking up their role and ongoing. It would appear that there was no forum for these senior leaders to discuss the impacts of their daily emotional labour, and without a common discourse, they did not have the vocabulary to discuss this with colleagues within their senior teams. Surprisingly, there is no requirement for senior leaders of schools, mainstream or special, to have any supervision, unlike care staff (DfE, 2015) or therapists who may be employed by the schools. Additionally, it seems that the senior leaders in this study were operating within a top down leadership framework (Fletcher, 2004; Grint, 2005) but it is difficult to ascertain whether this was due to a lack of continuing professional support and training or their own social construction of a senior leader of an autism specific special school. The more recent, post-heroic model where leadership is collaborative, relationships and interactions are key, and followers are empowered to become leaders, (Grint, 2005) was not evidenced in any of their reported practice.

8.2.3 Research Question Three Findings

A key finding was that participants were engaging in strategies aligned to the original concept of emotional labour, without being aware of this concept prior to the research, addressing research question 3. There was a distinction between the stakeholders with whom specific

strategies were used, with surface acting being used primarily for staff or local authority officers, whilst deep acting was used with students and parents. Some participants recalled wounding events (Ackerman and Maslin Ostrowski, 2004), and vividly described the impact that this had on their emotional labour and wellbeing with one participant reporting that she felt professionally unsafe as a result. The dissonance between emotions as felt and emotions as displayed was also described by participants with many talking about putting on a face or stepping into role to help them accommodate for this, which could be perceived as using elements of both surface acting and deep acting, depending on the persona adopted. However, participants did not seem to have an understanding of the longer-term impacts of this dissonance on their wellbeing, which may account for why five of the nine had left the profession by the time this thesis was submitted, citing burnout as the reason for their departure.

The findings of this research indicated that without the ability to build resilience the emotional wellbeing of participants was impaired. Day and Schmidt (2007) purport that resilience is aligned to moral purpose which is itself fundamental in promoting achievement for both students and staff, which is supported further by research which refers to the prominence of terms such as resilience and well-being in the field of education (Crawford et al., 2018; Sardar and Galdames, 2018). The data provided insight into the resilience building strategies which were a major factor in enabling the participants to manage their overall well-being, although as can be evidence from above, this was not always a long-term solution to the challenges that they faced. Many cited physical exercise as an activity which enabled them to switch off from the enduring nature of their emotional labour and opined that without this, they would struggle to maintain their emotional stability and well-being, thus curtailing their ability to run their schools effectively.

An uplifting section of the data from this study was that participants reported restorative factors which they perceived as fuelling their enthusiasm for their roles, compensating for the emotional labour that they had reported. The positive emotions experienced from these restorative factors became a resource upon which participants could draw when negative factors increased their emotional labour. It appeared at the time of the interviews that this element, alongside the reported resilience building strategies, was sufficient to facilitate their

ongoing commitment to the job, despite the suggested impacts of emotional labour, although as has already been reported, this was found to be erroneous by the end of this study.

8.3 Original Contribution to Knowledge

Reflecting on the gaps in the literature highlights the original contribution to knowledge established by this study. Whilst previous research (Jennett, Harris and Mesibov, 2003; Mackenzie, 2012) has explored the impacts of emotional labour on teachers of students with SEN and/or autism, a gap was identified regarding emotional labour and leaders of autism specific special schools. This thesis claims to make a contribution to the existing research in the field of emotional labour, extending knowledge and enhancing understanding of the impacts of this within the field of leading autism specific special schools. However, there is the potential for a wider reach to leaders of units attached to a mainstream school, where the unit supports students with a similar profile to those in the current research.

In this previously under-researched field, this study has evidenced the daily experiences of senior leaders in participant autism specific special schools and the impacts this has on their practice and personal wellbeing. Suggestions have been put forward as to why these specific environments may hold more emotional labour challenges for senior leaders, and participants have shared their emotional labour management and resilience building strategies. The fragile balance of positive resilience building and restorative factors versus the negative contextual and environmental factors which impacted on participants has been explored, with the resultant tip to impaired well-being, role alienation and burnout resulting from an excess of negative factors explained. The findings from this research have significant implications for our understanding of the induction and continuing professional development programmes which should be implemented for aspiring senior leaders in autism specific special schools, and potentially, senior leaders in units attached to mainstream schools. New knowledge stems from a broader view of the landscape of autism specific special schools and there are further implications for policy and teacher training generally, as the movement of teachers between mainstream and autism special schools or autism units attached to mainstream schools is fluid. Without the discourse of emotional labour and a more in-depth understanding of the links between environment and emotional labour established in this research, concurrent with robust and effective continuing professional development and

support, the high rates of attrition may continue. To assist the reader, the original contributions to knowledge are listed below:

I. **Theoretical contribution to knowledge:** Emotional labour theory in a new context
II. **Methodological contribution to knowledge**: Unique study giving empirical insights into senior leadership lived experiences in autism specific special schools
III. **Empirical contribution to practice**: Crucial data indicating the need for CPD and ongoing support for senior leaders in autism specific special schools. Broader implications for all those undertaking initial teacher training. Preparation and ongoing support for senior leaders joining educational environments which cater for students with autism.

8.4 Implications and Recommendations

8.4.1 Limitations

Caution should be exercised regarding the generalisability of the findings of this research due to its small-scale nature and the specific cohort of students attending the three participating schools. The context of the schools in this study may also be a limitation, as they were day schools who did not offer extended day provision or residential opportunities, giving participant senior leaders limited opportunities to interact with some stakeholders outside of a formal learning environment. A key limitation relates to the disclosure by participants of their emotional experiences, (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2011; Crawford, 2007) and it could be questioned as to whether the participants had the required vocabulary to reveal their full feelings or whether they wanted to present themselves in a favourable light as representatives of their profession.

An additional limitation from the study arises from the need to protect the identity of the schools and their participants. A case study of the three schools would have been an interesting research project, but this was not possible from an ethical perspective, as the potential damage to parents, students, staff and participants would have been immeasurable.

It should also be noted that two interviews were conducted following the first lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic, and this may have negatively impacted on the participants perspective of their emotional labour. However, the researcher was open to this possibility and was alert to any significant differences between these two interviews and those conducted prior to lockdown, but none were apparent. Notwithstanding this, the research has provided a unique insight into the emotional experiences of senior leaders in participant autism specific special schools and suggests that aspiring leader in such schools require the language and opportunity to explore their own emotional landscapes and to support their colleagues to do the same

8.4.2 Implications

Whilst not claiming generalisability from this research, the implications from this small-scale study have implications at a number of levels. The participants in this study were generous of their time and their experiences, which revealed several issues for this particular cohort. Many participants experienced incidences of emotional labour where the resultant impact appeared to leave them feeling ‘wounded’ (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004), with no facility to support them through this wounding and subsequent recovery. Without this, they seemed to carry the memories into their everyday practice and for some, this resulted in physical symptoms when they came into contact again with the particular stakeholder responsible for the wounding event. Because of the enduring nature of their stakeholder relationships, this could result in the same physical reaction being felt over a period of years, and the resultant emotional dissonance having a subsequent impact on their overall wellbeing and their ability to support those that they lead, resulting in role alienation and burnout.

With five of the nine participants leaving the profession during the writing up of this thesis, the impact on the schools concerned cannot be negated, although the impacts of Covid may also be a contributory factor. The recruitment of senior leaders can be a protracted process as individuals in these positions are often on six months’ notice period, and if the incumbent is off work, then the schools may find themselves without key members of staff for a few months. Added to this are the related costs, both financial and time, as post appointment,

there will be induction and training required for the new appointee, alongside the possible implementation of new working practices impacting on other staff. However, it is not just senior leaders in schools similar to those in the current research which may be impacted by their emotional labour experiences, as leaders of units attached to mainstream schools which support a similar cohort of children are likely to encounter equivalent experiences, albeit on a smaller scale.

8.4.3 Recommendations for practice

It is suggested by Brennan and Mac Ruairc (2011) that the smooth running of any school can be supported by emotions or can be hindered by them, but the management and regulation of these emotions falls to senior leaders. Using the discourse of emotional labour may provide leaders with opportunities for conversations within leadership teams using terms that are understood by team members, allowing an outlet for reflection and communication of individual experiences and a recognition that leading such schools is an emotional practice, as has been unveiled with this study.

Without an induction which addresses the emotional labour that the new senior leader is likely to encounter (Rae, Cowell and Field, 2017) and provides information on strategies that other leaders have found effective, concurrent with a forum for discussing encounters which may have impacted on the senior leader, the cycle of impacted well-being, senior leader resignations and a search for new leaders is likely to continue. It would therefore be prudent for an overview of emotional labour to be included in all teacher training programmes, so that new entrants to the profession are aware that this is a recognised concept rather than something that is unique to themselves, with those moving on to provision for autistic students having more in-depth professional development and support.

As a result of this study, there is a greater understanding of the need for senior leaders in autism specific special schools to follow a similar model to that of therapists, with regular opportunities to meet with a mentor or supervisor, (Rae, Cowell and Field, 2017), who has deep knowledge and understanding of autism specific special schools as this study has

evidenced that the experiences of senior leaders in these schools is different to generic special or mainstream schools. Whether the suggested supervision is individual or for the senior leaders of a particular school to undertake jointly is an area for further discussion, but as the data from this research had demonstrated, no such forum currently exists. Coaching was found to be a supportive intervention in the empirical research undertaken by Saldar and Galdames (2018) with the headteachers in their study reporting that it supported their resilience and ability to bounce back from adversity, and this may be another support option for senior leaders, although it is time and cost intensive.

Alongside these suggested supports, information regarding the self-management and resilience building strategies which research participants reported as compensating for their emotional labour may be provided. With wellbeing such a high priority in education, it is incumbent upon proprietors and governors of autism specific special schools to ensure that their senior leaders receive opportunities to support their emotional labour as a priority to stem the attrition rate of leaders in this profession. It is posited that the provision outlined will reduce the rate of attrition of senior leaders in autism specific special schools (Gronn and Lacey, 2004; Scott and McNeish, 2013), as they will be better prepared for the demands of emotional labour.

The findings of this study have implications for the training and development for aspiring senior leaders at autism specific special schools and several recommendations can be made with the aim of breaking the cycle discussed previously. These recommendations are outlined below:

I. Emotional labour and the discourse associated with this to be introduced as a concept in teacher training programmes
II. Supervision of autism specific special school/unit leaders to be a statutory requirement as it is for care workers and therapists, with this supervision providing a psychologically safe space for discussion of their emotional labour
III. Senior leaders moving to provision for autistic students to receive in-depth continuing professional development and support on the concept of emotional labour

IV. All staff working in provision for autistic students to be provided with training on the concept of emotional labour
V. Preparing new senior leaders in autism specific special schools for the range of stakeholders with whom they are going to interact appears to be a necessary element of their induction programme, as the data suggests that it is unlikely that they will have experienced this in their previous settings.

8.4.4 Recommendations for future research

Following on from the recommendations for practice in the previous section, listed below are some recommendations for future research which have been identified by the current researcher:

I. Further research to investigate whether the phenomenon in this study is replicated across all provision for school age autistic students or whether it is particular to the specific cohort in this study
II. Research to investigate whether there are differences between day and residential special schools for students with autism
III. Conduct a national survey of senior leaders in autism specific special schools to explore requirements for continuing professional development and support programmes
IV. Further research to examine the emotional labour experiences of senior leaders who have left the profession to explore whether this was a contributory factor in their departure

The next section of this chapter will explore the researcher's reflections on their Education Doctorate journey.

8.5 Reflections

Choosing to follow the Education Doctorate route for further study enabled me to research an area that would have implications for practice, not just for individuals, but for the wider field of schools and policy, which I had not envisaged at the start of my research. It was important from the outset that the everyday experiences of the participants were recounted, giving them a previously unheard voice, thus providing deep insight into their emotional labour.

My personal development as a researcher has led to a deeper understanding of the research process and the requirement for critical analysis of the relevant literature facilitating the development of a balanced argument supporting this study. During the process of research, data collection, data analysis and finally, committing the information to paper, my skills as a researcher have developed and my understanding of qualitative research has been honed. My ability to put aside my previous perceptions of emotional labour and its causation in autism specific special schools, although challenging at times, supported the data analysis process whereby individual accounts and shared experiences provided a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The phenomenon that I chose to investigate was revealed as sensitive in nature which is not something that I envisaged at the beginning of my literature review, as participants revealed their experiences with a range of stakeholders, and the potential impacts of these both psychologically and physically. I now have a greater understanding of the impacts of emotional labour on senior leaders in autism specific special schools and the social constructions of a school leader working in such an environment, where one stakeholder's construction may be different from the next, and where these senior leaders are attempting to satisfy the expectations of each stakeholder group. These encounters were greatly amplified where emotions had been at the heart of the experience, with unresolved emotional encounters having the greatest impact on senior leaders, something which I had not previously recognised or accounted for.

In the methodology section of this thesis, I detailed the ethical concerns regarding data collection and the requirement for this was apparent during the individual interviews, when

some participants became tearful as they recounted previous encounters with various stakeholders. Participants were offered time out from the interviews, but none availed themselves of this, preferring to take a few moments to compose themselves and then continue. Post interviews, I was left feeling deeply connected to the participants and their experiences which had been so vividly recounted and committed to ensuring that their voices would be heard as at the time of the interviews, they reported having no other outlet for retelling their stories. Gauging the impact of their experiences challenged my own interpretations and assumptions of situations recounted, and I had not anticipated the long-term effects that participants described. Consequently, I am now better able to appreciate the significance of the enduring emotional labour to which they are exposed and the subsequent impact on their wellbeing.

Since the beginning of my doctoral studies, my understanding of educational research and the requirement for a sound theoretical framework has developed, and I now feel that I have the requisite skills to undertake further research in the areas of interest, specifically how to better support senior leaders in autism specific special schools.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Information and Consent Form

Researcher:
Name Sarah Sherwood
Phone:
Email: s.j.sherwood@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Supervisor:
Name: Karen Jones
Phone: 0118 378 2603
Email: k.jones@reading.ac.uk

Information Sheet for Senior Leaders

Research Project (Title): Emotion Work: The impacts when leading schools for young people with autism

Dear School Leadership Team member

I am an EdD candidate at the University of Reading, UK. As part of the data collection stage of my dissertation, I am writing to invite you to take part in a research study about the emotion work that is involved in leading schools for young people with an autism diagnosis.

What is the study?

The aim of this study is to ascertain the impacts of the emotion work that school leaders undertake in their day to day interactions with students, parents and staff. For the purposes of this study, Emotion Work relates to the occasions when leaders either suppress of elevate their emotions to meet the perceived expectations of their role. It hopes to make recommendations regarding how I can best ensure that the induction programme for school leaders who are employed in schools for children with autism prepares them for this aspect of their work.

Why have you been chosen to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this project because I am looking for members of senior leadership teams in autism specific special schools. A total of approximately 10 people have been invited to participate in this study.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether you give your permission to participate. You may also withdraw your consent to participation at any time during the project, without any repercussions to you, by contacting me, the Project Researcher, Sarah Sherwood, Tel: , email: s.j.sherwood@pgr.reading.ac.uk.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be invited to take part in a 1:1 interview, lasting no more than one hour, which will also be recorded and transcribed. You will be provided with a pictogram prior to the interview to help you reflect and think about the different groups of stakeholders and the associated emotions you may use with them. There is no requirement for you to complete this pictogram, but it may facilitate the discussion. The interview transcript will be shown to you in order for you to check its accuracy and to confirm that you are still happy for its contents to be used. The information gathered will be used by the researcher for data analysis.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

The information given by participants in the study will remain confidential and will only be seen by the researcher and the supervisor listed at the top of the letter. You will be assigned a pseudonym to distinguish your responses from those of other participants. This pseudonym is in no way associated with your name. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. I anticipate that the findings of the study will be useful for school leaders in planning how they induct and support new members to their leadership teams.

What will happen to the data*?*

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you, or the school to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Participants will be assigned an identifier and will be referred to by that identifier in all records. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer and only the researcher, Sarah Sherwood and the Supervisor Karen Jones will have access to the records. In line with the University's policy on the management of research data, anonymised data gathered in this research may be preserved and made publicly available for others to consult and re-use. The results of the study will be presented in my thesis.

What happens if I change my mind?

You can change your mind at any time you can withdraw from the research without any repercussions. If you change your mind after data collection has ended, I will discard the data.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact Dr Karen Jones (supervisor), University of Reading; Tel: 0118 378 2603, email: k.jones@reading.ac.uk

Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information, please contact the researcher Sarah Sherwood,

Tel: , email: s.j.sherwood@pgr.reading.ac.uk

I do hope that you will agree to your participation in the study. If you do, please complete the attached consent form and return it, sealed, in the pre-paid envelope provided, to me.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Signed: (Researcher)

Date: 6.9.2019

Consent Form:

Project title: Emotion Work: The impacts when leading schools for young people with autism

I have read and had explained to me by Sarah Sherwood the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I understand that I will be interviewed and that the interview will be recorded and transcribed.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to being interviewed:

______ ______

yes no

I consent to this interview being recorded: ______ ______

yes no

Name:

Signed: Date:

University of Reading

Appendix 2 – Ethical Approval

University of Reading

Institute of Education

Ethical Approval Form A (version May 2019)

Tick one:

Staff project: ______ PhD _____ EdD __✓__

Name of applicant (s): Sarah Sherwood

Title of project: Emotion Work: The impacts when leading schools for young people with autism

Name of supervisor (for student projects): Dr Karen Jones

Please complete the form below including relevant sections overleaf.

	YES	NO
Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that:		
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	✓	
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	✓	
c) gives a full, fair and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	✓	
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	✓	
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	✓	
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention and disposal	✓	
g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	✓	
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	✓	

i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email . If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included and their name provided	✓		
k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants	N/A		
j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: 'This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct'.	✓		
k)includes a standard statement regarding insurance: "The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request".	✓		
Please answer the following questions			
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).	✓		
2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to (1)?	✓		
3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?		✓	
4) Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/PeopleDevelopment/newstaff/humres-MandatoryOnlineCourses.aspx Please note: although this is on staff pages it is also for students.	✓		
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form to be included with this ethics application?	✓		
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?	✓		
	YES	NO	N.A.
7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?	✓		
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?	✓		
9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent?			✓
10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data, or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?	✓		

11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?			✓
12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?		✓	
12b) If the answer to question 12a is “yes”, does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?			✓
13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?		✓	
13b) If the answer to question 13a is “yes”, please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.			✓
14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?		✓	
14b. If the answer to question 14a is “yes”: My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University’s insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.			✓
If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below			

- Complete **either** Section A **or** Section B below with details of your research project.
- Complete a risk assessment.
- Sign the form in Section C.
- Append at the end of this form all relevant documents: information sheets, consent forms, tests, questionnaires, interview schedules, evidence that you have completed information security training (e.g. screen shot/copy of certificate).
- Email the completed form to the Institute’s Ethics Committee for consideration.

Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.

A: My research goes beyond the ‘accepted custom and practice of teaching’ but I consider that this project has **no** significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box.)	✓
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc. Maximum of 10 participants for 1:1 interviews – all will be senior leaders/senior teachers/senior therapists	
Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words noting:	

1. title of project
2. purpose of project and its academic rationale
3. brief description of methods and measurements
4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria
5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)
6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with then.
7. estimated start date and duration of project

1. Emotion Work: The impacts when leading schools for young people with autism
2. Investigating emotion work of leaders of autism specific special schools. Hypothesis is that emotion work of these leaders is greater due to social communication and interaction difficulties/emotional recognition and regulation difficulties encountered by students and some parents.
3. Following literature review and pilot interview emerging themes explored in 1:1 interviews providing thick descriptions of emotion work. Participants will be given a pictogram to support their thinking and reflection.
4. Senior leaders at two autism specific special schools in southern England. Volunteers for 1:1 interviews with choice/timing of venue.
5. Consent for research requested from Headteachers. Participants receive information sheet, requesting confirmation in writing of willingness to participate in 1:1 interviews and pictogram to complete prior to interview
6. Ethical considerations regarding confidentiality addressed by anonymising participant information, being sensitive to participants disclosures, and keeping data securely. If participants become distressed remembering key incidents, given option to take a break/resume on a later date/withdraw/contact EAP support services which is a 24/7/365 confidential service offering advice across all areas of employees lives, signposting additional services if required. Interview transcripts sent to participants for amendments. Summary of findings available to participants.
7. Data collection – September 2019 – June 2020

B: I consider that this project **may** have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute's Ethics Committee.	

Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc.

Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words.

1. title of project
2. purpose of project and its academic rationale
3. brief description of methods and measurements
4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)
6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with then.
7. estimated start date and duration of project

RISK ASSESSMENT: Please complete the form below

Brief outline of Work/activity:	Focus group discussions and in depth 1:1 interviews

Where will data be collected?	At two schools in southern England

Significant hazards:	None identified. The schools themselves have a duty to maintain a safe area of work within the school.

Who might be exposed to hazards?	N/A

Existing control measures:	The rooms fall within the school's Health & Safety responsibilities.

Are risks adequately controlled:	Yes

If NO, list additional controls and actions required:	Additional controls	Action by:

C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:

Note: a signature is required. Typed names are not acceptable.

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.

Signed: Print Name: Sarah Sherwood Date: 6.9.2019

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

Signed: ... . Print Name...Carol Fuller Date...10/9/19

(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative)*

* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

Appendix 3 – Interview Questions

Outline Questions for individual interviews

Re-iterate the right to withdraw at any time. If the participant feels uncomfortable at any time they can request that we stop/take a break/postpone. Remind participants of the EAP service available to staff.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my research on the emotion work of school leaders in autism specific special schools. The aim of the research is to better prepare school leaders entering this specialist arena to be prepared for the different types of emotional management required to successfully fulfil their role, and prevent, as much as possible, stress and burnout. I will provide you with a copy of the transcribed interview so that you can amend anything that you think I may have misinterpreted. Can you confirm that you are OK with the interview being recorded?

- My first question is, thinking about an average working week, how frequently do you engage in emotion work?
- What type of emotion work do you engage in – how do you manage your emotions?
- In the research I've undertaken there are two types of emotion work that it suggests leaders engage in, one is surface acting, the 'have a nice day,' service with a smile where you don't really feel the emotion that you are portraying and the other is called deep acting, which is where you try and summon up the emotion that you want to portray, so if you've had a bad Ofsted you try and conjure up a positive emotion to present to staff before you go in to give the message. Have you used surface acting in the past, and if so, in what context?
- And what about deep acting?

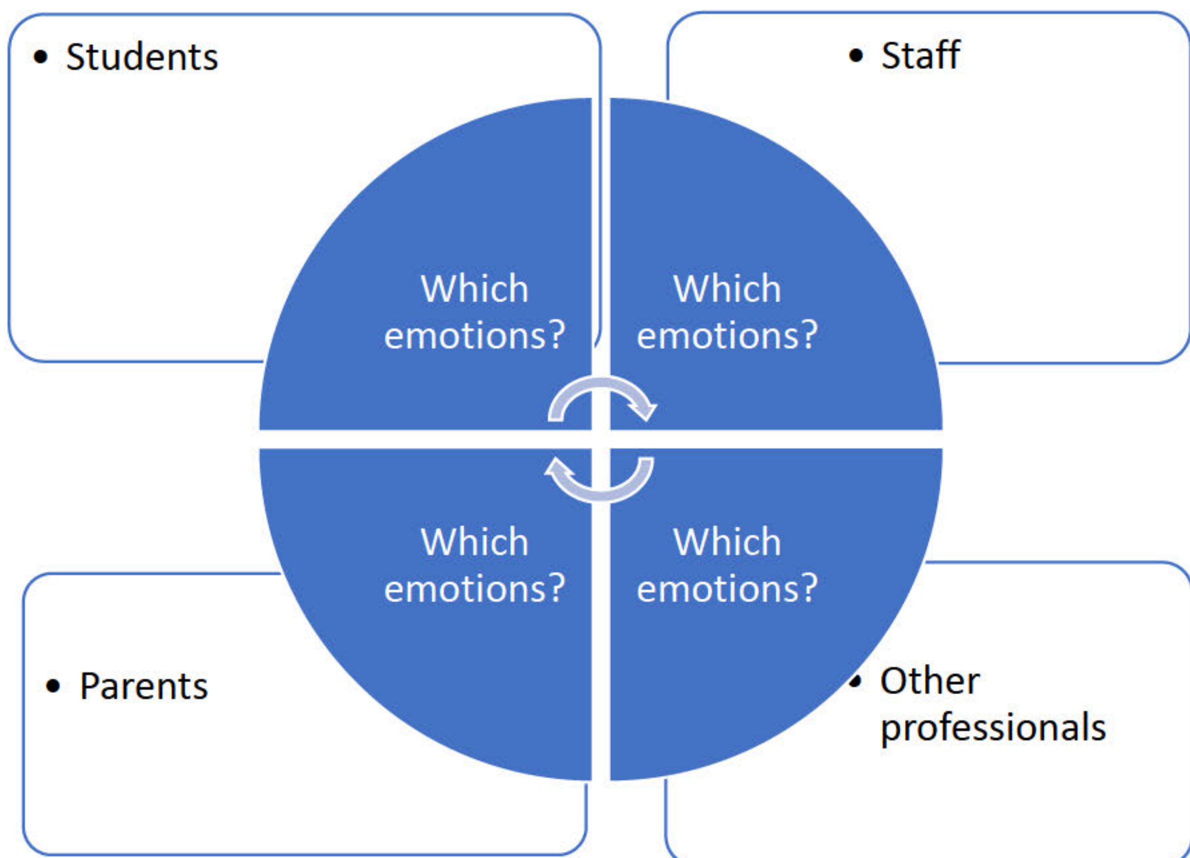
- Were you aware prior to your appointment of the level of emotion work you would be engaged in?
- Can you describe any other emotion strategies that you use, and with which stakeholders you use them?
- Have there been any key turning points in your emotional management since you've been here?
- What keeps you awake at night?
- Finally, can you describe any positives of the work that you do and whether they make the emotion management worthwhile?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Appendix 4 – Pictogram for participants

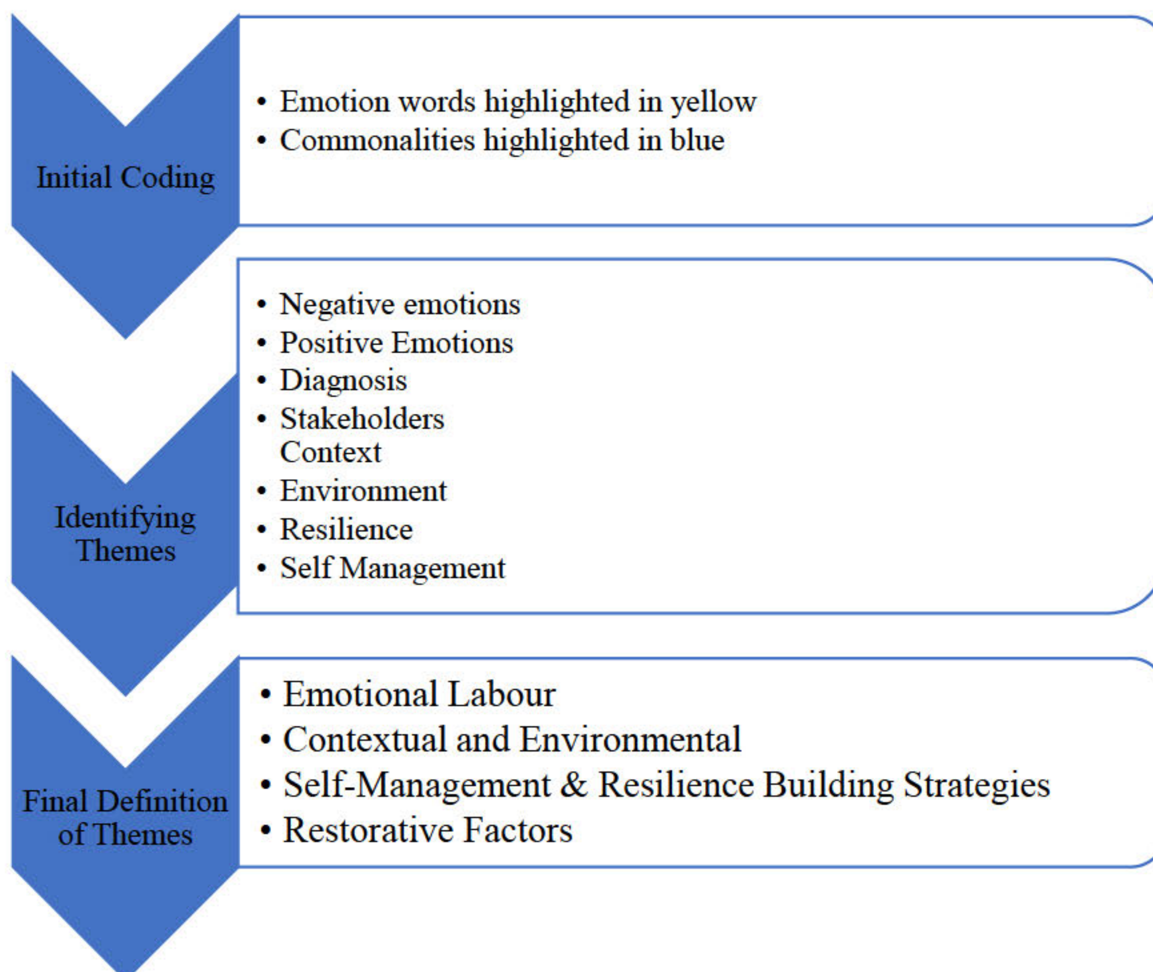
The Emotion Work of School Leaders

The pictogram below may help you to think about the various groups of stakeholders that you come into contact with on a daily/weekly basis, and the emotions that you regularly feel in respect of these encounters. The stakeholders suggested are not definitive, so please feel free to add others. There is no compulsion for you to complete this, but you may find it useful as a starting point for our discussion.



Appendix 5 – Data analysis

Stages of Data analysis:



Examples of Codes Derived from Data

Emotional Labour codes	
Loneliness	*..it's lonely when you're dealing with this on your own.* *It gets very lonely.*
Fear	*a lot of my emotions come from fear underlying fear of, umm, did I say or do something that triggered that* *… it's the fear of the response ..*
Contextual & Environmental	
Frequency	*Every single day,* *Oh goodness,* [pause], *daily* *It's an everyday occurrence*
Staffing Structure	*such a small school everything lands at your door* *we're a small team* *we don't have the levels of management or staff* *such a limited management structure*
Self-Management & Resilience Building Strategies	
Fitness	*Put on some music and walk* *For an hour at the gym* *I go to the gym regularly* *I run*
Performing	*It's like play acting* *I tend to step into a role* *that act, that performance, that face that I put on*
Restorative Factors	
Progress	*Our students do such amazing things, make such progress* *when a student hasn't been able to access the lunch hall and suddenly, there they are sitting there, with a massive meal in front of them*

Examples of Data Analysis

has up set them but they don't recognise that. When it comes to managing my own emotions… I think I do that pretty well on a day to day basis, but others may disagree, (laughs). I kind of step into a role when I come through the gate – my work persona – you know it's funny, my husband always says I'm a different person during term time, and I return to the normal me during holiday periods, so I guess I must adopt a persona to cope with the day to day issues that arise and the consequent emotions. I think because of this, I don't always recognise when I am emotionally impacted by situations or issues that arise, but there are times when I need to talk things through and find myself becoming tearful … it always surprises me when that happens but I suppose it's a case of coping at the time – you know, the adrenaline's running and you go into automatic pilot mode, but it's the come down afterwards (pause). And I get really upset, angry and frustrated when I think children have been let down, whether that is by us, their parents, their authority, or some other stakeholder.

- self-management
- playing a role
- emotion work
- frequency
- sense of self
- playing a role
- emotion work
- sadness
- self-management
- self-management
- emotion management
- stakeholders

Welcome XXX, and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my research on the emotion work of school leaders in autism specific special schools. The aim of the research is to better prepare school leaders entering this specialist arena to be prepared for the different types of emotional management required to successfully fulfil their role, and prevent, as much as possible, stress and burnout. You have signed a consent form to take part in the research, but you have the right to withdraw at any time during this process. I will provide you with a copy of the transcribed interview so that you can amend anything you think I have misinterpreted. Can you confirm that you are OK with the interview being recorded?

Thinking about the average working week, how frequently do you engage in emotion work?

It's an everyday occurrence. I don't know that I'm fully aware when I am doing it, but on reflection, yes, it happens every day – not always with the same people, but that managing my initial emotional response to situations is a large part of my role.

What type of emotion work do you engage in – how do you manage your emotions?

Hmmm ... good question, as I'm not always aware I'm doing it. (Long pause). I suppose thinking about it, it's an almost daily struggle against the tsunami of emotions that I encounter, and how I manage that to ensure that I am still able to do the job for which I am paid. There's not a day goes by when I don't support students in managing their emotions – it's one of their key difficulties, because often they have no concept of what has caused the change in their emotion and how to manage that. Unpicking the trigger can sometimes take hours ... and even then I'm not always sure that we have uncovered the real trigger. To be honest, quite often I think they are perseverating on something that has happened outside of school – either at home or when they are playing games on-line that

Oh yes, (laughs) I hope I haven't made it sound like a joyless experience. I get so much from working here. Our students do such amazing things, make such progress. It's mainly the little things though that bring me joy, the picture that a student had drawn for me, the first time a student responds when I have been saying good morning for weeks, when we get a breakthrough when doing a comic strip conversation debrief of an incident, those are all things that lighten the load enormously. Then there are the events we put on for parents, the fundraising that our local community does for us, the local organisations that support our student with work experience, all of those, they make it so worthwhile. Mind you, even after all these years, I do find it odd that you think you've got a great relationship with a student and their family and then on their last day at school when they are transitioning off to their adult placement, they just walk out the door, don't say thanks or goodbye just go (laughs) sounds like a Gloria Gaynor song (laughs again), sorry, showing my age now. [shrugs and shakes head].

restorative
environment
restorative
contextual
+ve emotion
environment
restorative
+ve emotion
context

Thinking about the average working week, how frequently do you engage in emotion work?

That's something I hadn't thought about in depth until you asked me to be part of this research. If I'm honest, every day in one way or another. When I first started here, I came from a mainstream management background ……. At interview I was told about the demands of the job, and I thought 'Yeah, I can do that, it's not hard', but …. It was a shock – I hadn't realised that in such a small school everything lands at your door…… [laughs] in mainstream, I was on the SMT so below me I had Heads of Department who line managed their subject specific teachers, and above me was SLT – most issues kind of jumped my tier of management ……. It was either sorted by the HODs or whoever it was wanted someone more senior than me. For the first six weeks it was like …… I guess the best analogy is being in a large amphitheatre, full of people, all waiting for your first move or utterance …… and stage fright – I really was completely unprepared for the volume of direct face to face interaction that came my way – parents, staff, students……. I wasn't sure at the time that I could survive it …….. but I have and I'm proud of myself for still being here. I guess over time I've got better at managing the emotional surges that I get on a daily basis – or I've just become inured to it – ha, yes, that could be it.

What type of emotion work do you engage in – how do you manage your emotions?

Well, I didn't manage them initially [long pause], not at all, and I wondered if I ever would…………But yeah, I regularly suppress my frustration with staff, you know, when I really want to say 'Just do it' ….. and I guess with parents, my initial response would be to say to them 'you don't have to fight anymore and micro manage – we know what we're doing here', but I guess they just want to ensure that their child is safe ….. you know, I kind of reflect on this often, if I

personal, it's a personal attack, um, yeah, but if you're asking me how I dealt with it, I put it in, what do they say, I put it in that filing cabinet where that's work. The only time that it conjures up again, is, because it was so horrible, is you have a fear that it will happen again, and you don't want it to happen again, so you want to go and live in Wales and live in a hole, you think right I want to go there where nothing's every going to happen to me, where these people can't hurt me and they can't follow me and um, you know, at it's very worse, I was, I think, I'm going to write a bloody anonymous letter to The Times when I retire, about this, and the bullying of Headteachers in SEN schools, and then I think, they'd come after me in Wales in a hole, so you get, you get really paranoid. You get, these people are going to come after me and um, it's going to be vindictive and it's never going to leave me. And that comes from XXXXX, from the stuff that they wrote on line, and shouting at me outside the school. [Participant became tearful at this pint so pause of approximately 1 minute 30 seconds. Offered to continue later in the day, but they opted to continue]. When I think about it, it's not just me, so why do I take it so personally, because it wasn't just me, there were others, you know, MXXXXX had awful things written about her on-line, IXXX did, there was a whole group of us, it was horrible, but I took it personally. I took it personally, um, yeah, I think with the complaints that came in, and the SARS it was loss of control as well. You know, you saw it with LXXXXX, I'm like, what kind of Alice in Wonderland have I stepped in here? But I don't know what's going on. It's like smoke and mirrors, it's deceptive. Um, when I spoke to JXXXX she said beware of, what is it, um, (long pause), gaslighting, that goes on a lot now, it makes you feel like you're kind of in a position where you're having to, whatever accusation is made at you, you're having to prove that it's wrong, rather than, you know, you're guilty before you're innocent. That's it, you're guilty before you're innocent, so I'm having to prove that I didn't, when actually, we shouldn't event be working that way. But I get the process, I get the process and that's what has to be done,