

Where are the part-time women teachers in senior school leadership: Inequalities, tensions and timescapes?

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Published version

BROWN, Suzanne (2023). Where are the part-time women teachers in senior school leadership: Inequalities, tensions and timescapes? Educational Management Administration & Leadership.

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Educational Management
Administration & Leadership
1–15

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DOI: 10.1177/17411432231219679

journals.sagepub.com/home/ema



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Abstract

The chances of a woman teacher who works part-time in a secondary school becoming part of the senior leadership tier are slim; yet, little research exists around this inequality. In this study, a life history approach was used to gather the messy and subjective truths of women's lives as part-time teachers and their relationships with time and career progression. New evidence of tensions emerged resulting from women navigating the demands of both their professional and home-life roles with insufficient time. Crucially, their various roles demanded different relationships with temporal features or timescapes. Frequent and bumpy traversing of these different timescapes was necessary in navigating their paid roles alongside their home-life responsibilities, and this came with a cost to emotional wellbeing as well as deterring them from progressing their careers. Importantly, these insights help explain why part-time working can impact negatively on women teachers' motivation for career progression and how this can lead to inequality in senior leadership.

Keywords

Part-time, flexible working, schools, women, timescapes

Introduction

Although women make up the majority of the teaching workforce (Coleman, 2002; European Union, 2020; Evetts, 1994; Fuller, 2013; Gov.uk, 2017; Jerrim and Sims, 2019; Moorosi, 2010; Smith, 2011a, 2011b), school leadership is predominantly in the hands of men who work full-time. This research makes a new contribution to the understanding of why this is the case. Across the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 68% of all teachers are female; yet, on average, only 47% of school principals are women (Jerrim and Sims, 2019). Furthermore, on average across the TALIS (2018) participating countries, 96% of principals reported that they were employed full-time (Jerrim and Sims, 2019). Women who work part-time

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in schools are less likely to achieve a senior position compared to their full-time colleagues, particularly men (Hughes, 2002). This context of inequality and social injustice (Fuller, 2017) is important. Both being a woman and having a pattern of working which is not full-time individually diminish chances of achieving senior leadership in schools. Crucially when these factors are combined, the chances of a part-time woman teacher becoming a senior leader are even more unlikely. The findings of this research offer a novel perspective around this inequality in leadership, which is from the perspective of women teachers who work part-time.

This pattern of working and implications for careers are better understood in other professions such as nursing (e.g. McIntosh et al., 2012; Pringle, 1998) and midwifery (e.g. Prowse and Prowse, 2015); yet, studies continue to neglect teaching. Only a small body of research (e.g. Chessum, 1989; Moreau et al., 2005; Worth et al., 2018; Young, 2002; Young and Brooks, 2004) exists around part-time teaching. This is problematic because this inequality in school leadership remains in the shadows where understanding about the impact of working part-time is lacking and challenge seems unlikely. Against this background, this research addresses this gap in understanding by presenting new findings concerning the relationships of part-time women teachers with their lack of progression to leadership roles by asking the following research questions:

- How do women teachers who work part-time navigate the tensions between their work and home lives?
- How does navigating these tensions shape their aspirations in relation to leadership roles?

This article contributes to a new understanding of inequality at a senior leadership level in schools. The nature of the tensions which emerged from the data were predominantly about having insufficient time to carry out their paid and caring roles in a way that they would prefer. Consequently, this paper refers to the identified tensions in relation to having insufficient time. It shines a new light on why these roles are not always aspired to by women who work as part-time teachers. The paper advances theorisation of the navigation of tensions in relation to insufficient time experienced by the women. Novel insights emerge of how these navigations negatively influenced their aspiration to senior leadership.

Theoretical framework

Within the school setting, relationships with time are situated within the notion of clock-time: calendars, timetables and the teaching day are all planned within linear time (Hughes, 2002). This way of organising time is referred to by Davies (1990) as ‘male’ time due to the patriarchal character of the influences in the way time is conceptualised and measured. This gendered model fits with men’s lives and assumes a full-time and continuous availability which does not fit with the reality of many women’s lives (Evetts, 1994; Hughes, 2002; Nicolson, 1996). This research exposes how tensions emerge for those whose lives are not lived in this way along with the extinguishing effect this can have on aspirations to senior leadership roles. Within this dualistic framing of temporal relations, domestic and care tasks are more akin to ‘feminine’ or cyclical (Davies, 1990) models of time consciousness (Knights and Odih, 1995) which privilege relationality, reproduction, domestic and emotional forms of work. Within this conceptualisation, caring and domestic responsibilities are made invisible and left marginalised in discourses around time management (Burke et al., 2017).

The theoretical lens of timescapes (Adam, 1990, 2004) was used to make meaning from the life history data. Timescapes are useful for understanding the challenges faced by people regarding

institutional expectations about time across different contexts (Burke et al., 2017). Timescapes can be described as clusters of temporal features, including time frames, temporality, tempo, timing, time point, time patterns, time sequence, time extensions, time past, present and future which support thinking about temporal relations (Adam, 1990, 2004). The notion of 'scape' indicates that time, space and matter are inseparable and that context is important (Adam, 2004). Social practices, expectations and power relationships shape timescapes; such that our individual relationships with time are different and can lead to tensions (Burke et al., 2017).

Methodology

This research draws on ideas taken from feminist research. It draws on the life history approach taken by Smith (2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2015), which looked at female teachers' and headteachers' career decisions. A life history approach was taken to explore the messiness and complexity of the women's day-to-day lives (Miller, 2017) and to learn about their subjective relationships with time and career progression. Accounts of the perspectives and interpretations of people are accepted and considered pertinent in this methodology because they provide insights into how people navigate the constraints and conditions in which they work (Faulkner, 2015).

Methods

Ethical approval was granted by the Brown's employing university. The data are drawn from a larger project (Brown, 2019). Approximately 60 headteachers of state secondary schools in England were asked to circulate written details of the research to all part-time women teachers in their schools, hence acting as 'gatekeepers'. As a teacher-educator, I took this approach for the purposes of professional courtesy (Brown, 2019). Potential participants were asked to contact me directly. Consequently, whilst the participants became known to me, they remained anonymous to the gatekeepers. Pseudonyms for both the participants and the schools were used. I tried to minimise researcher-researched hierarchy (Brayton, 1997; Oakley, 1981; Stanley and Wise, 2002) from the outset in line with feminist research approaches. Written consent was sought from the participants to take part in the research and for our meetings to be recorded. Personal safety, ethical and recording issues were considered when meeting each of the six women on two occasions.

The locations were suggested by the women – including cafes. We checked that we could not be overheard, but that audio recordings could be made. At our first meeting, each participant was asked to talk as she wished about her life and career, along with the significance of part-time working to her story. This approach was encouraged when follow-up questions were asked. After transcription, the participants were encouraged to check their own transcripts for accuracy and clarification and to add additional comments. This 'respondent validation' is regarded as one of the best ethical safeguards and an important part of the process of co-constructing life histories (Mearor and Sikes, 1992). Although in agreement for their stories to be used for research purposes and dissemination, the women were not asked for their permission to share their complete life histories publicly as a data set to avoid compromising their anonymity. Participants in life history research should be protected in a way over and above conventional research ethics practices (Faulkner, 2015). Six months later, I met the participants again to revisit and co-construct their life histories as part of a process of respondent validation of their stories (Mearor and Sikes, 1992). Like Faulkner (2015), I too became

a trusted confidant, and with this privilege came the responsibility to look after the sensitive information shared with me.

The women who volunteered to participate were white, were married to employed husbands and were mothers. This lack of diversity is a methodological limitation, and the subsequent stages of the research were mindful of this. However, differences in the participants' education, employment histories, management experience, age of their children and working patterns were apparent and of research interest. Vignettes of the women's lives and experiences can be found in Brown (2019: 72).

Data analysis

I read the transcripts from the first meetings many times whilst listening to the digital recordings. Long pauses and periods of silence (Goodson, 2008) were marked on the transcripts, along with potential 'critical incidents' (Measor, 1985). Pauses can be indicative of difficult questions being asked or important points being made 'I have got something important to say, but I may not wish to say it' (Goodson, 2008: 4). Critical incidents are more likely to occur at times of change and decision-making where priorities are re-assessed (Measor, 1985). This provides an insight into the building of peoples' identities at certain times of their lives. The initial interpretations of the transcripts were shared with each participant at our second meeting as part of the process of co-constructing their life history (Biott et al., 2001). Our second meetings followed through the threads from the first meeting, enabling clarification, amendment, expansion and development of the points made by the participants leading to co-constructed life histories. The transcripts from these meetings were validated in the same way as those from the first meeting and as previously described.

I used a thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to interpret the life history data, with the participants' words being pivotal in making meaning. NVivo was used to help organise the transcript data. The approach was not about developing a single irrefutable truth or homogenising the data and experiences of the participants. Instead, the analysis aimed to maintain the women's subjectivity and identity in the realities they described, whilst enabling sufficient researcher objectivity to address the research intentions.

Results

This part of the analysis speaks to the first research question and provides rich details about how the women juggled the different demands for their time. Whilst the findings are interesting in their own right, they also provide the necessary context for the consideration of the second research question around how the navigation of the identified tensions shapes their aspirations (or not) to senior leadership roles.

Tensions around insufficient time, and how the women tried to navigate them, emerged from the data. Difficulties in managing the time demands of both paid work and being a parent were striking. This fuelled an unwillingness to adopt the full-time working pattern which they believed to be a necessary requirement based on the profiles of their own senior leaders. Furthermore, managing their time within and across different timescapes proved challenging, particularly at the points of transition between their professional and home-life timescapes. How the navigation of these tensions deterred them from progressing their careers forms the focus of this section, which is divided into two parts: (i) being a teacher-carer and (ii) managing time and timescapes.

(i) Being a teacher–carer

Working part-time, for these women, was about combining being a non-paid carer with paid work. Whilst five of the six participants had young children, Amanda's children had left home. Her husband worked away during the week, and Amanda provided care for her elderly mother. Amanda's own role as a mother was soon to be extended in becoming a grandmother. Her well-being jostled with insufficient time to do the things she wanted to do at this stage of her life (Brown, 2019). She had a chronic medical condition which left her tired and in pain.

When I first met Amanda, she worked 3 days a week and was the head of a small department. Her health and caring roles were her reason for this pattern of working. At our second meeting, Amanda explained that she had now decided to work 4 days a week to manage her workload – although she was conflicted about this decision. Amanda intended to stay at her current school until retirement and did not want further career progression. The extract below explains how she struggled to manage the demands for her time at work and at home:

Well, I think because I'm older, time for me is more about quality of life now. I can totally take on board if you've got a young family, of course you need to be with your children, but for me it's about, I want a work/life balance. I want to get to the weekends and if the sun's shining outside and want to go walking for the day. I want to be able to grab my walking boots and off I go, instead of thinking, yeah but I've got that stuff to mark, and I need to get those reports done, I need to do this, and I need to do that. I want to work; I want to fit all the things I have to do into my working time so that when it is my time, I'm free to do what I want to do. I'm also going to be a grandmother at the end of the year-

* Oh lovely.

I'm so excited about that I can't describe, but again you know this panic in the back of my mind just thinking how I am going to have time to be a fun grandmother and spend time with my grandchild. I've got so much to do, that's awful. Why am I thinking like that at my age, you know, I really should be thinking, that's fantastic, right I've got the weekends I'll be able to, you know, take them out and whatever.

(Amanda, second meeting)

Amanda's heartfelt and guilty reference to 'panic' and 'awful' suggests her navigation of these tensions around having too little time was both physically and emotionally difficult. She realised she would need more time to return to motherhood, albeit in its extended form as a grandmother; Amanda begrudged the time spent at home doing schoolwork because it stopped her spending time with her family. She felt guilty because she was unable to devote herself fully to both her growing family and her teaching role (Smith, 2015).

Going for a walk was Amanda's way of finding time for herself. This was squeezed, even though her own children had left home and she no longer worked full-time. The tensions involved in navigating family life with part-time working in middle age are glimpsed through her words. Her mothering role continued to shape her decision-making which was shaped by gendered expectations of motherhood.

Whilst her own ageing had a linear dimension in relation to time, this was intertwined with feminised and cyclical conceptions of time (Davies, 1990). This intermingling of different timescapes was precarious for Amanda (Adam, 1990, 2004), and her joy was tempered with guilt. She was positioning herself into an older age shaped by the perceived expectations of remaining a carer to her own mother, children and imminent grandchild.

Amanda worked part-time to give ‘work–life balance’, but this pattern of working did not deliver this. Available time for family and other interests is crucial to those whose identities are distributed across both the workplace and other activities (Negrey, 1993). ‘Greedy’ jobs (Edwards, 1993) which limit the opportunities for self-expression due to their restricting of other activities can lead to resentment (Edwards, 1993), and the beginnings of this are apparent in Amanda’s words.

Struggling with her health alongside her working and caring responsibilities, Amanda did not want to return to full-time working. Based on the hearsay and experience of others, she perceived this meant that she would not be considered for further promotion:

I honestly don’t think I’d really be considered for anything above where I am now (with) being part-time.

(Amanda, second meeting)

Her lack of enthusiasm for such advancement was intertwined with resignation that her career was unlikely to progress. This was a price she was prepared to pay for working part-time.

Louise was in her 30s and worked three consecutive days each week. She arrived at school early, and left late, to complete her work at school rather than taking it home. Louise employed a nanny 36 h a week to look after her three young children during her three working days. Her husband occasionally worked away from home. Louise was thoughtful about future career opportunities but commented that her family circumstances currently precluded her from pursuing them, particularly as her husband’s career took priority over her own:

I would like to get into a role like that (pastoral leader) but, I mean it’s partly my current situation in that my husband has a very busy work situation and so there’s really, I’m always sort of the one that has to make sure I’m back, I mean he does at times, but there’s really sort of no leeway there as well for me to sort of have any extra time to be able to do things.

(Louise, second meeting)

Louise had little control over her scheduling at work but felt she was able to achieve flexibility and control at home by temporarily handing over her responsibilities for extended periods of time. To ‘replace’ Louise in the home, many paid hours of care, domestic responsibility and time were bought from the nanny:

But it means then that I can get everything, just about everything done for work that I need to do in those three days. So, I don’t often have to bring work home, which is hugely advantageous, because as soon as I’m at home you know I’m hit with, Mummy can do you this, that and the other. Also, just from the point of view, if I had to do things with the children and then start doing work after they’d gone to bed, I’d just be feeling so tired. So, I find it much easier to get everything done at school, leave later than quite a few people at school because I’m getting it all done there, but yeah it does mean it’s contained within the three days that I work.

(Louise, first meeting)

Glimpses emerged of Louise occupying a timescape (Adam, 1990, 2004) in which her paid working time and space were separated from her home-life and caring responsibilities in a way not experienced by the other participants. Buying time and care enabled ‘feminine’ time (Knights and Odih, 1995) to be

subcontracted to the nanny. This enabled Louise to have large blocks of uninterrupted 'male' and linear time (Knights and Odih, 1995) at school without worrying about what was happening at home. Contrary to the stories described by the other participants, Louise's description, above, of how she navigated her professional life alongside her personal life is more akin to full-time working.

At school, Louise was able to focus on her paid role because the societal and gendered responsibilities of motherhood were temporarily lifted by the nanny. Louise's movements in and out of public and personal boundaries (Tamboukou, 2000) were less frenetic than those described by the other participants who did not employ a nanny. Louise appeared less stressed. However, being in a financial position to employ a nanny is not always possible. Compared to the other participants, Louise's transitions and straddling across work and home timescapes were less frequent and stressful. Not taking work home enabled her to participate in other activities without feeling stressed or guilty. This arrangement worked well for Louise, enabling her to achieve a work-life balance. She was able to devote herself to the needs of her teaching role, children and family life in large chunks of uninterrupted time. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that leadership roles were both difficult and undesirable at the current time due to her prioritising her role as a primary carer, not wishing to work full-time and a lack of precedence for part-time staff to achieve senior roles in her school. Talking about the possibility of being a leader in the future, she made the following point:

I would like to think that I would if I really wanted to enough, but I do feel it would be quite a mountain to climb because of the (lack of) precedents ... I think that people have raised the idea before and haven't got anywhere.

(Louise, first meeting)

Louise and Amanda did not see people like them enacting senior leadership, reinforcing their perception that neither could they. This shaped their personal de-selection from such positions. Bush (2018) makes the point that inadequate induction for school leaders can result in them modelling their own practice on their own leaders when they were junior members of staff. This can result in them replicating previous practice, for both better and worse. An induction programme for those new or thinking of senior leadership which highlights the possible benefits of flexible working is arguably a way forward in the diversification and 'widening of the lens' (Bush, 2018) through which leadership is perceived.

With children older than Louise's, Leah's thoughts around working at a leadership level were similarly complex and situated within the navigation of heavy workload alongside her other commitments. Leah was in her 40s, married to a deputy headteacher and with three children under the age of 10. Leah was agentive in trying to be a positive role model for her children:

My children are getting a lot from seeing me go to work and they know that I work hard, and they see me marking and they're part of that more now. I think that gives them a lot of lessons in life and it's not so stereotyped. They see that I think that my job is very valuable and important, and they respect that. And if you speak to them, they wouldn't want me to work more time, they really, really value when I take them to school, when I pick them up from school, because twice I've been offered extra days recently, and I've spoken to them about it and they've said, please don't do it Mum.

(Leah, second meeting)

An apparent tension is glimpsed between her past, present and possible *future selves* (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Prior to motherhood, Leah occupied a full-time middle management position,

spending long hours at work and explaining her work had been her life. Her guilt from returning to full-time work after her first maternity leave was almost tangible:

I had to put my child into nursery, felt guilty all the time, very long days for him. Thankfully, on a Friday my mum had him for a day, so I did feel that was, at least I was giving him a little bit. I just felt incredibly guilty because the pastoral roles are very emotionally challenging. You're taking on board lots of other people's problems and trying to solve them for them. I felt that by that stage I hadn't got as much room for those other people's problems because I'd now got my own child and I needed more headspace for him.

(Leah, first meeting)

Her subsequent request to work part-time after the birth of her second child was granted with the expectation that she relinquished her middle management position.

Leah perceived that resuming full-time working would be necessary to re-boot her career back to middle leadership; yet, she did not want to upset her children by being unavailable when they wanted/needed her. By not enabling Leah to keep her middle management position on a part-time basis, the school sacrificed her skills and experience. Once on track for senior leadership, Leah's career progression was now seemingly compromised because it was no longer aligned with the continuous or linear progression model preferred by schools (Moreau et al., 2005) and which does not mirror women's lives (Coleman, 2002; Evetts, 1994; Hall 1996; Smulyan, 2000).

Leah recognised that she could no longer work the very long hours which she had done prior to having children. Her affective and precarious relationship with time is illustrated through her mention of 'headspace' and the panic and anxiety of juggling too many things at once. She now felt unable to fully devote herself to her job and that, consequently, she would not perform as well. She perceived her temporal contributions within both her home and work-life timescapes to be insufficient and inadequate:

I think when I was just working without my children my whole world was my work, so that was my focus all the time. After I'd had my eldest, I thought that my memory was going. But actually, I was talking to other parents and talking to my mum, I realised that you're just trying to remember so much and trying to keep on top of so much and I didn't want to be forgetting things for my own child. For example, at school, I wanted to be there and present for him and, you know, able to support him emotionally and not having all the work stuff just taking over my life, which it could at a certain time it could do that. I just felt like I couldn't divide myself between the two anymore and I had to prioritise and I had to give that space, that thinking time, that emotional time I suppose for my own children and that was more important really.

(Leah, second meeting)

Guilt is a powerful influence and motivation in Leah's representation of herself. Leah was aware of her own time 'map' in making this decision and the implications in terms of the 'possible geography' (Burke et al., 2017) of her career progression. Pursuing senior leadership was no longer considered the option it once was by Leah.

Family lives evolve, with consequent implications for working lives. The notion of working flexibly is likely to mean different things to different people at different times; hence, requests for flexible working should be considered on their own terms and be reviewed regularly so that changing needs can be met on both sides (Brown, 2019). Being a teacher-carer for all the women in this research

involved navigating the competing demands for their time. Alongside this, they recognised that they would be unlikely to progress to senior leadership roles whilst they worked part-time. They were resigned to this cost and were not motivated to work at this level if the price was full-time working.

(ii) Managing time and timescapes

This section discusses women's difficulties when managing the demands upon their time, both in relation to their paid work and at home. In doing so, it shines a new light on how working reduced hours was not the solution they were hoping for. Navigating demands for time, both at home and at work, is not unique to part-time working; I will, however, highlight the relationships with time and space which discouraged the women from aspiring to senior leadership roles.

Jane worked in a middle management position for three full and two half days each week. She occupied the most senior role amongst the research participants. She described her anxiety as she transitioned in time and space across the timescapes of her paid and non-paid roles:

The transition times are difficult, so when I'm leaving the house to go to work and when I'm on the way home or trying to leave work and on the way home, those transition times are quite tricky. There's tensions and pulls from all directions. And on days when I leave at 12.30, or I'm supposed to leave at 12.30, there's a lot of tension and pulls. For example, today I haven't finished, I haven't done what I need to do, but I'm better now at saying, well I'm afraid that's your time.

(Jane, second meeting)

Moving across and between these different rhythms is how timescapes are experienced (Burke et al., 2017), with transitions across them often bumpy. When leaving at lunch time, her part-time working pattern did not follow the dominant and institutionally structured model of time at work, resulting in tensions. Jane recognised the 'tensions and pulls' (Burke et al., 2017) as she moved across and within the different timescapes of work and home, acknowledging how difficult it was for her to leave on time:

As soon as I've left work, I feel a bit of tension when I'm leaving work, oh should I just make that phone call, oh should I just go and do that, but once I've left work, no. I find that quite easy to think, right no I'm not going to look at emails, I'm not going to do any work, I'm not going to do anything until the kids have gone to bed, because those are the days where they can have their friends back for tea or we can have time together. So that's particular examples of how I've ring-fenced time.

(Jane, second meeting)

Jane acknowledged that navigating the expectations and temporal demands of different timescapes was difficult, particularly when her children were younger. In retrospect, Jane was pleased she had continued with her paid role, acknowledging that this continuous and linear pattern had been advantageous to her career progression so far (Moreau et al., 2005). Nevertheless, she looked back on that time with stress, guilt and anxiety. This deterred her from resuming full-time working whilst her children were young. Jane's experiences highlight the need for employers to acknowledge the potential vulnerability emerging with life changes such as becoming a mother. At these times of life-changing events, employees may need additional support from their employers and line managers when making decisions around working patterns. This support seems vital in enabling women to remain in the workforce and to position them for further promotion when the time is appropriate.

The multiplicity of tasks undertaken by women is not captured by conceptions of time which are clock-time or task-defined. These conceptions do not truly capture the allocation of mental time or forms of consciousness required to juggle women's responsibilities (Edwards, 1993). Leah described the often difficult relationships between her home and work timescapes:

I think perhaps working part-time has helped me to do that to be fair, it's given me the skills to do that and I've relaxed into that more and I thought, when I'm at work, I'm working, it's intense, I'm working hard, but actually when I'm at home I have the right to switch off. That's not that I don't answer my emails. I'm still checking work emails but it's a quick thing, fired back.

(Leah, second meeting)

Leah 'borrowed' time from her home timescape (Adam, 1990, 2004) to respond to work emails. Not keeping up to date appeared to be a source of stress. This borrowing of time was a compromise she made to avoid these negative feelings. Showing her dedication to her paid role meant being available even if she was not physically at work. This shows how reduced visibility due to flexible working can be gendered (Lewis and Humbert, 2010) and comes with a pressure to be seen to be still in the 'workplace' working long hours.

These cognitive transitions between her work and home timescapes were stressful and show how institutions impose structures, regulations and rhythms around time without considering the multiple and various demands people are subject to across their different timescapes. This leaves individuals to use their competencies and skills to manage their time (Burke et al., 2017). Like all the participants, Leah bought flexibility from her employer at the expense of her salary and the stalling of her career progression.

In summary, due to their deeply contextual nature, timescapes are linked to personhood and difference (Burke et al., 2017) with time and space being inseparable (Adam, 1995). The women's day-to-day lived experiences of part-time working were situated within a timescape unique to them and their relationships with time and space. Frequent physical and cognitive traversing of their school and home timescapes was an invisible and skilled way the women managed their time. This involved flitting backwards and forwards within and between different and highly personal timescapes. Living in this state of flux, alongside the necessity to be thinking about what they had to do next, was an intrinsic part of navigating the competing demands for their time. The stress this involved served to demotivate them from progressing their careers to senior leadership level as they believed they could not cope with and/or did not want the additional workload associated with the move to full-time working which they believed would be necessary for such roles. Consequently, the inequality around part-time women teachers being less visible at senior leadership can be partly explained by women de-selecting themselves from such positions for reasons linked to caring for others, excessive workload and difficulties in managing the competing demands for their time.

Discussion and conclusions

So, how did these women teachers working part-time navigate the tensions between their work and home lives? Whilst working part-time might be considered as 'having it all' in terms of career and family life, the time demands of both roles were still too big for the women in this research. Family and work are both 'greedy' institutions in terms of the time they demand and are also structured by the time requirements of others (Edwards, 1993). Part-time, rather than full-time, working was

revealed as an attempt to try and navigate the tensions due to having insufficient time. Yet, it is clear from the women's stories that this pattern of working had not fully delivered the solution they were hoping for.

The notion of teaching as a 'family-friendly' career is challenged by Moreau (2020) who argues this claim is underpinned by heteronormative and maternal views of women which do not consider this 'friendliness' in terms of women's careers. This research reveals how part-time working is not necessarily more 'friendly' than full-time working to families, careers or women's emotional well-being. Twenty years on, the words of Coleman (2001: 19) still resonate loudly: 'Gender related stereotypes and practical issues relating to domestic responsibilities continue to make it difficult for women to attain senior positions in education'.

When making decisions around adopting part-time working patterns, the benefits, costs and implications of working part-time rather than full-time need to be considered from a range of perspectives, including the possibility of negative implications for careers and advancement to senior leadership. The women in this research appeared resigned to, and accepting of, the implications and negative impact of working part-time on their career progression to senior leadership.

This paper offers a novel contribution by theorising this predicament through the consideration of the women's struggles in relation to timescapes. Day to day, the women's lives involved relationships with time which were organised in a more cyclical, feminised way (Davies, 1990). The frequent and difficult traversing of home and work timescapes by the participants was often at times misaligned with the linear (Hughes, 2002) rhythm of the school day. Such crossings were at different times to their full-time, and indeed other part-time, colleagues and were a source of stress and anxiety. When discussing the theory of gendered organisations in science in relation to flexible working policies, Lewis and Humbert (2010) make the point that women's secondary position in the workplace can be partly attributed to practices and assumptions which might appear gender neutral but which, instead, are grounded in a masculine working model. Here an ideal worker, and arguably more likely to be in the frame when promotions are considered, is positioned as someone who can work in a way synonymous with no caring or social responsibilities. These assumptions are based upon, and reinforce, the normalisation of a full-time working pattern. This was out of alignment with the working patterns of the women in this research and seems particularly pertinent in schools. The women recognised that they were not, and did not want to be, aligned with this position. This served to demotivate them from aspiring to senior leadership positions.

So, how did these tensions and their navigation impact on the women's choices in relation to senior leadership? Layered and gendered expectations disadvantaged the women's opportunities and shaped their reluctance to progress to more senior roles. Cohesive approaches to leadership preparation recommended by Cliffe, Fuller and Moorosi (2018) to combat inequalities were not apparent in the women's described experiences. Despite taking the decision to work part-time to balance the various demands upon their time, it was not successful and came with a damaging cost to their careers. The women made it clear they were not, could not and did not wish to be continuously available to work. They recognised that as part-time workers, they, along with their alternative pattern of working, were at odds with the notion of normalised full-time working in schools. They perceived that to advance their careers, or in some cases to return to a position at a similar level, they would have to resume full-time working. They felt they would not cope with the demands of a full teaching workload, based on their experience of working reduced hours. They were willing to forego (senior) leadership roles as they did not want to work full-time, a step they perceived as being a necessary prerequisite.

Theorising the rich life history data using the notion of time and timescapes (Adam, 1990, 2004) has developed a novel understanding of working part-time as a teacher. The reasons for the women's personal de-selection from progressing to senior leadership provide a new understanding of the inequality around why so few part-time women teachers are found in positions of senior leadership in schools. This de-selection occurred at different stages of the leadership ladder for the different women. Such understanding is necessary and important as it informs and contributes to the debate around imbalances in equality in the workplace and wider society. If senior positions in schools are more likely to be enacted by men who work full-time, gender divisions are reinforced by providing pupils with a gendered view of society in which being a woman and/or working flexibly is unsupportive of career advancement to senior leadership.

This paper has implications for practice. Bringing about such change is not only important from a school workforce perspective but is situated within a bigger moral imperative to challenge inequalities in opportunity. Fuller (2017) makes the point that, at the current rate, it will be 2040 before women's representation in leadership matches their representation in the teaching workforce. Robust challenging by leaders of any narrative and practices around why senior leadership cannot be enacted on a flexible basis is necessary in bringing about change, along with the addressing of hefty and prohibitive workloads. This study has revealed how women's flexible working is linked to demands at different times of life and may not be a permanently preferred working pattern. Langford and Crawford (2022) highlight that school leadership and the way leaders go about influencing working conditions play a significant role in whether teachers feel supported or not. They argue that these actions may have a long-term impact on teachers' perceptions and wellbeing with an impact on teacher retention. Consequently, regular conversations with their senior leaders to identify if, and how, changes in working patterns might support teachers experiencing different challenges may be an important part of addressing inequalities around leadership.

As with any research, there are limitations to this study; future research could seek to recruit a more diverse sample of women to add insights from a wider range of day-to-day lived experiences. The debate around flexible working has become more heightened in the COVID-19 era (Perna, 2022; Staglin, 2022). Further study would be valuable, post-pandemic, in the teaching profession.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the women who generously agreed to give their time to meet and tell me about their lives. I hope this research has enabled your voices to be heard. Thank you to Jacqueline Stevenson, Carol Taylor, Alison Hramiak, Mark Boylan and Lisa McGrath.

Data availability

Research data are not shared in order that ethical standards are not compromised due to concerns regarding loss of anonymity.


Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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